

*Writing the Troubles:
Gender and
Trauma in Northern Ireland.*

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Abstract

This thesis argues that the interaction of gender and trauma theories within the fictional prose writing of five women authors from Northern Ireland whose work spans throughout the mid-twentieth century until the present day, suggests a crisis of individual and collective identity during the traumatic decades of the Troubles. This necessitates a re-engagement with literary tropes and historical representations of the emerging sense of Northern Ireland as a six counties nation. The first chapter considers how trauma theories have been defined and developed and assesses their value for readings of Northern Irish literature. This provides the critical framework used in the subsequent chapters to enable close readings of the novels and short stories. Mary Beckett's narratives highlight the continuing trauma of Northern Ireland's inception, the Second World War and Internment, while giving voice to the strong women who fought against traumas and traditions in hope of a positive future. Linda Anderson engages with 1980s feminism, while depicting the Troubles alongside Cold War politics, anti-nuclear war protests and the Civil Rights Movement to expand upon the impact of war on female identity. Deirdre Madden and Jennifer Johnston recreate Irish Gothic Big House literature, utilising their tropes and images to explore the traumatic fracturing of history and identity on individual and collective levels. Anna Burns enables a post-traumatic engagement with the Troubles by moving retrospectively through thirty years of violence using absurdity, carnivalesque and fantastical imagery to explore the unknowability at the centre of trauma. All five writers acknowledge the impact of trauma on a sense of self that becomes divided between the pre- and post- trauma time, and suggest that the liminal spaces created by trauma may allow for readings of history and identity beyond the confines of patriarchy, nationalism and colonialism.

Dedication:

To my Family
Past, Present and Future

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Three of the chapters from this thesis have been trialled in conference papers which have subsequently been published: excerpts from chapter two can be found in Brian Griffin's *New Voices in Irish Studies: Essays on History and Literature* (Bath: Bath Spa U P, 2009), ideas from chapter three were first considered in *Beyond the Anchoring Grounds: More Cross-Currents in Irish and Scottish Studies* edited by Shane Alcobia-Murphy et al (Belfast: Queen's U P, 2005), and sections from chapter five appear in *Voicing Dissent: New Perspectives In Irish Criticism* edited by Sandrine Brisset and Noreen Doody (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2012). A short summary of Linda Anderson's work is repeated in *Gonzalez Irish Women Writers* (London; Westport CT: Greenwood, 2006) and the section in chapter one on Graham Dawson is based on work I did for a review of his *Making Peace* for *Irish Studies Review* (Bath: Bath Spa U P, 2009). I am grateful for the many academics who engaged with the readings of my conference papers over the years. In particular I am thankful for the support and advice of Professor Margaret Kelleher, Dr Claire Wills, Dr Scott Brewster, Dr Clare Connolly, Professor Patricia Coughlan, Dr Eamonn Hughes, and Dr Moynagh Sullivan. I would like to thank above all my supervisor Professor Kate Chedgzoy who has supported me throughout what has been a lengthy and at times difficult process. Without her insight, knowledge, and friendship this would not have been possible. I am grateful to the many people at the University of Newcastle who have given me advice and guidance over the years including, Professor Linda Anderson, Dr Anne Whitehead, Professor Jenny Richards, Dr Stacy Gillis, Dr Kirsten MacLeod, Professor Kim Reynolds, Dr Mike Rossington, and Rowena Bryson. I am thankful for the helpful advice of Professor Cathy Caruth during her visit to our reading group and for her interesting debates with Professor Jenny Edkins during their visit to the university. I gratefully appreciate the debating skills of the members of the Trauma Reading Group who helped unravel difficult theories and stimulated thinking on trauma. I particularly want to thank Clare Lindsay for her friendship and support as we ploughed together through the dark days of trauma research. Finally I thank my family for their practical support and for reminding me there is life beyond trauma.

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Introduction

The Initial Questions and Key Issues

The original impetus for this doctorate was to research the prose writing of women in and from Northern Ireland; to establish an understanding of female voices writing about the 'nation' of six counties in the north of Ireland, by identifying links and relationships between texts not previously considered as constituting a significant body of work. Despite the quality and importance of many women writers from Northern Ireland they have not been critically engaged with as extensively as their male counterparts. A reading of the novels and short stories of women from the North shows a breadth and depth of writing that demonstrates a multifarious depiction of women's experiences. However what unites these writers, particularly when considering the years surrounding and including the decades of the Troubles, is their engagement with the traumatic experiences of their female protagonists, which more often than not is connected to the history of the land and the fracturing of identity. This project necessitated choosing a sample group, which could demonstrate a variety of viewpoints from writing across the decades of the Troubles, which includes engaging with influences and traumas from the creation of Northern Ireland to its present day considerations. The five writers selected for this study are therefore from different backgrounds and their novels progress chronologically throughout the decades as a way of marking the changes in the form and subject material used by writers as the Troubles evolved. Mary Beckett is a middle-class Belfast Catholic who lives in Dublin, Linda Anderson is a Belfast Protestant nationalist who lives in London, Deirdre Madden is from a rural Northern Irish Catholic background but has also lived in multiple European regions, Jennifer Johnston is a Dublin-born Protestant who lives in Derry and Anna Burns moved from her working-class Belfast nationalist home to live in England. Their varied experiences are reflected in their novels and short stories, which also convey the shifting public attitudes towards the Troubles. By placing these writers in dialogue with one another and with trauma theory it is possible to explore the changes to society and the political arena throughout the periods of war and violence that encompasses the history of Northern Ireland.

Several questions arose from my readings of these women's writings. What consideration could be given to a grouping of people that has experienced a traumatic

break in its identity: do those who identify with the group find a similar need to explore, through memory, their past and current identities in order to create a new understanding of both the past and present and how do they engage with literary tropes and historical representations of a collective identity? The texts chosen for this study engage with the individual protagonist and the collective identities under crisis in traumatic and post-traumatic situations. In its simplest form trauma can be defined as an event or series of events that overwhelm the individual or community to the extent that it remains difficult to process, thus fracturing the identity. By understanding trauma theory and how it may impact individuals and groups, it is possible to appreciate the specific ways in which the authors engage with traumatic history and post-trauma identity. I would suggest these writers describe the continuing impact of the traumatic events surrounding the creation of Northern Ireland and the subsequent traumas experienced during the decades of the Troubles, in such a way as to suggest they remain unresolved on an individual and a national level.

The traumatic nature of Northern Irish history is born out in the overwhelming statistics surrounding it from the earliest years until recent times. Irish historians point out that, with the possible exception of the 1922-23 Civil War, more people died during the Northern Irish Troubles than in any other period of conflict in Ireland. Approximately three and a half thousand deaths were incurred which, when taken in conjunction with the small population of the six counties, suggests the impact on the population. In addition to the deaths, over fifty thousand people have been severely injured, which is equivalent to over 3% of the population. According to The Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey (Hillyard et al, 2003) well over half of the population personally knew someone who had been killed. No one was immune to the devastation happening in their communities as there were repeated images of death and violence in the media alongside discussions of the violent socio-political instability. Living in Northern Ireland provided constant fear of harm to self and others; many people witnessed death or violence and were continuously aware of the threat of death and violence. The role of the state, the presence of the British army, and the actions of the police force during the Troubles are also major contributing stress factors which are experienced on a collective level. With statistics such as these it is a reasonable assumption to suppose the national psyche of Northern Ireland could be described as traumatised; that the nation as a whole has experience of death and trauma.

The Good Friday Agreement or Belfast Agreement as it is also known, which was implemented on 10th April 1998, is considered to be the political agent of change that was to bring a cessation of violence and therefore aid peace in Northern Ireland through many factors including the establishment of a devolved multi-party government. The signing of the Agreement changed the political position of Northern Ireland with respect to both Britain and Ireland. This, alongside the paramilitary ceasefires, initiated the changes to the everyday living conditions experienced within these six counties. However the process of mourning for the dead, assigning meaning and focus to the past, and finding a way to attempt narrating the trauma of the Troubles, has only begun. In what could be considered a post-trauma period, the history and identity of the Northern Irish people is under reconstruction. The continuing level of social and political divisions and the repetitive outbreaks of violence, which is particularly evident during the annual commemorative periods such as the summer marching session, suggests that Northern Ireland has not assimilated its past and present identities but currently remains in a state of flux, negotiating its way through a traumatised history. A further question therefore can be raised in the midst of this concerning how the traumas of the twentieth century surrounding the creation of Northern Ireland may be resurfacing in attempts to narrate its recent troubled history. Northern Ireland's traumas appear in a variety of forms in the texts discussed here, which depict the repeated nature of trauma whereby events are re-experienced in subsequent traumatic occurrences as a return of the repressed.

There are three key themes that can be identified in the analysis of the chosen texts: individual and collective memory particularly as it relates to traumatic events or prolonged periods of violence; the difficulties of narrating trauma and the tools used by the writers to attempt to capture a story without resorting to narrative as we know it; and the confessional aspect of telling, whereby authors or their protagonists are relating their experiences of a time and place which has shaped their identity. These are summed up in the following quotations:

When memories recall acts of violence against individuals or entire groups, they carry additional burdens – as indictments or confessions, or as emblems of a victimized identity.[...] As memory emerges into consciousness, as it is externalised and increasingly objectified, it always depends on cultural vehicles for its expression. [...] It becomes important to look at the symbols, codes, artifacts, rites, and sites in which memory is embodied and objectified; the coherence or fragmentation of narratives, rituals, geographies, or even

epistemologies it relies upon; and the way their authority changes over time. (Antze and Lambek vii-xvii)

How can we speak about the unspeakable without attempting to render it intelligible and sayable? (Brison xi)

From my readings so far has come a feeling, now hardened to a conviction, that we all carry a piece of the story and the stories are all connected; and if even one of us fails to tell herstory we become stranded, damaged by the ignorance. We have obligations as writers and as readers. Because until we have heard all their stories, we can't go through the door. (Devlin 3)

Paul Antze and Michael Lambek highlight the relational aspects of memory; it does not stand alone but acts within its context in a variety of roles both for the teller and the listener, and it is worked upon within the specifics of history, culture, and many other codices, not just as it is first told but throughout further narrations. Susan Brison succinctly describes the problems of narrating trauma; how can trauma which is, by its very nature, outside the realms of everyday experiences, be told in a language that can fully reveal the experience? Bernadette Devlin emphasises the connectivity of narrative; how one's story can impact the telling or hearing of another's story. In addition by highlighting the word "herstory" Devlin acknowledges the importance of gender in shaping the narrative. By weaving these concepts together with close readings of the works of five authors it is possible to address the research questions identified in the opening paragraphs.

An important issue, which needs to be considered early in any research relating to Northern Ireland, are divisions within politics and community and how these impinge on definitions within history, memory and identity. It is impossible for example, to say Protestant or Catholic without suggesting all the historic associations of these labels, all of which will differ according to the experiences of the individual or group. It is also impossible to say Ulster, Six Counties of the North, or Northern Ireland without unearthing the memories and politics linked to each of these names. Although each terminology or label refers to the same geographical space, each is emblematic of very different historical memories, and in addition carries different understandings for the various communities living within this space. This illustrates the difficulty in denoting memory within Northern Ireland; it remains continually contested and full of politically sensitive meanings. Memory itself is under violent and radical attack, thus the sites of memory are also places of contention. This was illustrated by the recent changing of local street names to include their Irish equivalent, changing the names, uniforms and

emblems of the local police force, replacing controversial monuments (or adding additional statues alongside existing ones) and producing multiple cultural productions to suggest that all communities can be represented. All of these are examples of deliberate attempts to define the past and through it gain control of what it means to be 'Northern' Irish.

With the above considerations in mind, the question may be raised as to what makes these particular writers cohere as a distinctive group. In answer, despite the diversity of subject matter and style these writers have a definitive collection of voices coming from a particular place and time, with the common denominator of a focus on conflict and violence, either indirectly or through named reference. They are not however to be confused with the category of 'Troubles literature', a term loosely applied to the novels (the majority of which are by men, not all of whom are connected to Ireland), which focus on violent paramilitary activity.¹ Aaron Kelly notes in *The Thriller and Northern Ireland Since 1969* how the conflict has been typified as a "chain of killings",² and suggests that Troubles literature is "the dominant fictional mode of representing the North, supposedly granting appropriate literary form to national and historical experiences" (Kelly 1). Women writers however have widened their scope beyond this often clichéd genre to explore complex issues relating to regionally specific problems, depicting what it means to be a woman faced with a war literally fought in the homes, work places, pubs, shops, farmlands and streets. Although women were involved in paramilitary activity there were few actively fighting in paramilitary positions, particularly in the loyalist communities where women were segregated into non-combatant divisions.³ The cities were the spaces most affected by the constant presence of army Saracens and patrols with guns, helicopters, fortified police stations with armed surveillance towers, bomb threats and check points, but driving through any road at any time of the night or day might elicit an encounter with army or paramilitary checking credentials, vehicles and for some, body searches. There was no space that was safely separate from intrusion and possible attack. The constant images on the television and

¹ Troubles literature is a recognised term used to describe writing directly connected to the Troubles. A list of such work has been compiled by Bill Rolston (University of Ulster) and Robert Bell (Linenhall Library) for the CAIN website and can be found at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/bibdbs/chrnovel.htm>. Although they have included Mary Beckett *Give Them Stones*, Anna Burns *No Bones*, Jennifer Johnston *The Illusionist*, *The Railway Station Man* and *Shadows on their Skin*, Deirdre Madden *One by One in the Darkness*, and Linda Anderson *Cuckoo* the term has been used mainly to describe violent crime or thriller fiction.

² This quotation is from Brian Moores' *Lies of Silence* (1990)

³ The Republican movement were more accepting of women perhaps due to its association with human rights and had an early female figurehead in the form of Bernadette Devlin.

discussions on the radio were a background to the everyday expressions of the fear of death. In addition many were coping with Internment, poor housing and lack of work. The history of Northern Ireland is a history of these everyday experiences, which is an important consideration in understanding the present socio-political climate.

Repositioning Northern Irish Women's Writing

The novel and the short story are not held in the same esteem as drama and poetry in Irish literary critiques, therefore it is not surprising that Northern Irish women writing in these genres have found difficulty, primarily in achieving publication, and the subsequent inclusion in anthologies, companions and reviews, which sadly too often fall into the traditional pattern of overlooking or side-lining women's fiction. The work I have done on Northern Irish women's fiction has uncovered a plethora of talented writers that are too often misunderstood or ignored, which has unfortunately led to many of these writers disappearing from print. Mary Beckett's and Linda Anderson's writing are examples of novels and stories that can currently only be sourced through second-hand bookstores, which has a major impact on their availability for new readers and for teaching purposes. The impact made by the dispute surrounding the *Field Day Anthology* has gone some way toward helping women writers to find representation in collections of works however there still remains an inequality in the analytical engagement with Northern Irish women's writing. There are a number of factors involved in why this may be the case, for example, lack of interest or promotion from publishers or their choice for classifying the writing, lack of reviews on the work, traditional criteria that leaves women's writing invisible within critical works, and the lack of innovative frameworks that would allow women's writing to be understood as important representations and therefore to be repositioned within the Northern Irish canon. This thesis, by applying trauma theory to a body of work that has thus far not been considered using this paradigm, will create a new framework for understanding these writers and go some way to re-invigorating analysis of their work.

The invisibility of women writers is not confined to Ireland, but is part of all traditionally patriarchal nations where women have fought to have their voices represented. Nor is it confined to prose writers as Irish women poets have also suffered. Patricia Boyle Haberstroh in her introduction to *Women Creating Women: Contemporary Irish Women Poets* (1996) applauds publishers such as the Gallery Press,

Attic Press, Arlen House and Salmon Press for helping to circulate women's writing, but notes that their voices need to be spread into Europe and America in the same way as their male counterparts (Haberstroh 2). Publishers traditionally have specific types of writers which they wish to promote and tend to place their energies into categories which can ostracise the less traditional voices of the women writers. As Haberstroh points out, a 1983 study of published poets revealed that 89% of Irish poetry in publication was by men and 9% of the remaining 11% by women had been published by Attic Press, which leaves only 2% for other publishing companies (Haberstroh 9). It would therefore be interesting to discover how and where Northern Ireland's fiction writers are finding outlets for their publications. Within this thesis, of those writers currently in publication, all are published in London based companies: the prolific writing of Johnston has been published by Review which is a subsidiary of Headline Books, Madden's publisher is Faber & Faber, and Anna Burns' is Flamingo, which is part of Harper-Collins.

Publishers undoubtedly have a part to play in the promotion of women's work, but they are not the full story. Women writers who manage to gain publication also need to become visible through reviews of their work and the inclusion of their writing within current academic debates. This is an issue that came to the fore during the publication of volumes IV and V of *The Field Day Anthology* when women writers and academics fought to have their work included in what was in essence the establishment of an Irish literary canon. As one reviewer notes:

Since the outrage over the *Field Day Anthology's* virtual exclusion of women, feminists and other progressive writers have made a concerted effort to publish and publicize the works and words of Irish women. [...] Moreover, the continued failure of male critics, editors, publishers, and professors to mention or include Irish women writers in anthologies or reading lists suggests that the culture of Irish Studies is hardly woman-friendly. (Ebest 152)

This review highlights that, although there has been an improvement in the way that women have begun to be represented in anthologies and in current considerations of Irish writing, there needs to be a continuing "effort" in the battle to change how women's writing is included and considered. Margaret Kelleher summarises the problems in her review "*The Field Day Anthology and Irish Women's Literary Studies*" (2003) when she states:

Yet, with the exception of some individual critics, Irish studies as a discipline remains singularly ill-informed of (and by) the debates and concerns that have occupied Irish feminist criticism in the past decade. Meanwhile feminist critics, and those working in the field of women's writings more generally, have themselves moved slowly to a more public airing of these preoccupations and to their articulation in a more self-questioning mode. (Kelleher 82)

Kelleher suggests that there is an endemic problem at the centre of Irish studies as a whole that has marginalised women's writing. She argues that it is not just the concern of the traditionally male-dominated literati as feminist scholars need to take some responsibility for failing to vocalise these issues with more volume and conviction. She has highlighted within women's writing an issue that has also been problematic in feminist campaigning in general, particularly in the North of Ireland, where women's rights have often had to take a back seat to other political concerns. These issues are set out in Eileen Evason's *Against the Grain: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Northern Ireland* (1991) which describes the difficulties of maintaining a united women's movement during a conflict that continually divided women along party political lines. However as Valerie Morgan notes in her lecture on women's contemporary representation, it is imperative during the post-conflict years to re-examine how women's voice have been represented to ensure that the previous exclusion of women's views is no longer neglected.⁴ Women's writing is an important part of changing the way that women have been portrayed in the past and a re-engagement with their work will enable women to be represented in both the historical, and contemporary, cultural and political debates in Northern Ireland.

Three early women campaigners who helped to prepare the ground for changes in the way that women's writing is represented are Ailbhe Smythe, Ruth Hooley and Ann Owen Weekes. In 1985 Hooley brought to publication through Belfast's Women's Rights Movement's Press *The Female Line: Northern Irish Women Writers*, which was a collection that introduced into readership exciting new writers such as Fiona Barr whose "Wall Reader" has been republished in further anthologies such as Michael Parker's *The Hurt World: Short Stories of the Troubles* (1995), which has enabled it to be included in discussions of Troubles literature. Ann Owen Weekes produced an invaluable reference book to Irish women writers with *Unveiling Treasures: The Attic Guide to the Published Works of Irish Women Literary Writers* (1993), and her *Irish Women Writers: An Unchartered Tradition* (1990) was one of the first academic

⁴ This was a lecture given at the University of Ulster, "Peacemakers? Peacemakers?: Women in Northern Ireland 1969-1995." <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/women/paper3.htm>>

sources to explore new ways of reading women's writing. Similarly Ailbhe Smythe's thought-inspiring essay "The Floozie in the Jacuzzi" (1989) sparked off debates in Irish circles concerning the way in which women are represented, and represent themselves, in Irish writing. Smythe argues that women should try to forge new ways of writing rather than trying to fit into traditional moulds. Smythe proceeded to produce an important collection of women's work in her *Wildish Things: An Anthology of New Irish Women's Writing* (1989), and *Irish Women's Studies Reader* (1993), which collected essays looking at women's writing. The germination from all these works has enabled further anthologies, collections and critical perspectives to flourish.

There are several examples of texts where women's writing has found representation. Examples of places where women poets have been published are: A. A. Kelly's *Pillars of the House: An Anthology of Verse by Irish Women from 1690 to the Present Day* (1988), Haberstroh's study as quoted above, and her later edited book of women poets *My Self, My Muse: Irish women Poets Reflect on Life and Art* (2001). Louise De Salvo, Kathleen Walsh D'Arcy and Katherine Hogan's *Territories of the Voice: Contemporary Stories by Irish Women Writers* (1991), and Evelyn Conlon and Hans-Christian Oeser's *Cutting the Night in Two: Short Stories By Women Writers* (2001) are just two examples of anthologies which have helped raise the profile of women's short stories. Although not dedicated to women's writing John Somer and John J. Daly's *The Scribner Book of Irish Writing* (2000) carefully balances the number of male to female writers in its anthology, thus enabling several writers to be included who are normally ignored, as for example Cherry Smyth and Anne Devlin, keeping their writing in current circulation. Similarly Michael Parker's *The Hurt World* includes seven women writers amongst its chosen sixteen. Parker also adds Mary Beckett's "The Master and the Bombs" beside the more usual inclusion of "A Belfast Woman" and Linda Anderson's "The Death of Men" both of which are often overlooked in short story anthologies. These examples however are in stark contrast to more traditional anthologies such as William Trevor's *The Oxford Book of Irish Stories* (1989), which has only eight stories by women amongst the thirty-three by male writers. Similarly women writers make up less than a fifth of the works included in Stephen Regan's *Irish Writing: An Anthology of Irish Literature in English 1789-1939* (2004), which suggests the need for further work to be done to promote the writing of women from this era of Irish literature.

A similar story can be found when looking at academic research and how women are represented in contemporary critical debates. Examples of important research material and contemporary critical discussions of women's literature are Alexander G. Gonzalez's *Irish Women Writers: An A-to-Z Guide* (2006), Heather Ingman's *Irish Women's Fiction: From Edgeworth to Enright* (2013), Elke D'hoker, Raphael Ingelbien and Hedwig Schwall's *Irish Women Writers: New Critical Perspectives* (2011), and Kathryn Kirkpatrick's *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities* (2000). In contrast, works such as Michael Parker's *Northern Irish Literature: The Imprint of History* Volumes 1 and 2, have not only neglected to include Anna Burns, Linda Anderson and Mary Beckett, but prove to have a ratio of only 1 female: 4 male, with no women present at all in the first volume. Similarly Elmer Kennedy-Andrews' *De-constructing the North: Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles Since 1969* (2003), which attempts an overview of Northern Irish prose writing by dividing the novels into "Troubles trash", "liberal humanism", "postmodern humanism", "political fiction" and "women's writing", has included only seven women amongst the thirty writers discussed, and of these only four have lived for any significant time in Northern Ireland (Madden, Molloy, Beckett and Johnston) thereby questioning the representation of Northern Irish women's writing within this study. Kennedy-Andrews performs an essentialist division between emotional and domestic female spaces and male public worlds in such a way as to suggest a reinforcement rather than breaking down of these boundaries.

Unfortunately it is not only the male academics who are failing to achieve equality in their representations of women's writing, there are several women who have also fallen short in their consideration of women's work. Patricia Craig has produced two anthologies of writing from Northern Ireland, *The Rattle of the North: An Anthology of Ulster Prose* (1992) and *The Belfast Anthology* (1999). *The Rattle of the North* produces an odd mixture of writers that curiously leaves the women almost extinct and neglects to include any contemporary female novelists of the Troubles. Craig has chosen to include Sam Hanna Bell and Maurice Leitch, but has neglected to include Mary Beckett, Linda Anderson Jennifer Johnston or Deirdre Madden, despite including fourteen extracts from Brian Moore who emigrated from Belfast in 1948. From a critical perspective, Eve Patten negates women's writing by suggesting it is the writers themselves who are preventing their inclusion and representation. In her 1990 essay "Women and Fiction: 1985-1990" Patten highlights how women's fiction has often

been classified as “bad” or “clinging to realist and autobiographical modes”, which has left it outside the critical domain (Patten 1). Patten fears that the confessional tone of the 1980s women’s novels will marginalise the writing as women-only experiences and define women merely by their sexuality in a “fictional straightjacket” (Patten 4). She concludes that there is a need to move beyond what she considers a realist, confessional or quasi-autobiographical style into more experimental writing and new subject matters that would open up women’s writing:

In Ireland, there is a vested interest in producing women’s writing which is stylistically transparent, reactionary, anti-intellectual, anti-philosophical, and realist to the point at which it slips easily into journalism or polemic. But the flip side to this coin is a sad lack of encouragement for experiment in the kind of futurist fantasy or magic realism with which Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood have created rigorously critical social visions, or for any exploration, subversive or otherwise, of the romance and crime-thriller genres which continue to provide the staple commercial diet of women writers and readers. (Patten 7)

Patten calls for women to open up their palettes to new and vibrant modes of writing that will engage with modern women’s issues in ways that push the boundaries and excite the imagination. What is surprising in reading this essay is Patten’s narrow view of a body of writing that I would argue is marked by its diversity and experimentation.

In her later essay “Fiction and Conflict: Northern Ireland’s Prodigal Novelists” (1995) Patten continues with an overview of the changes she sees appearing in novelists which she describes as important new talents bringing a much needed injection into Northern Ireland’s prose. She considers Frances Molloy, Robert McLiam Wilson and Glenn Patterson as important talents giving new ways of exploring Northern Irish identity using postmodern techniques to bring irony and perspective within expressions of childhood experiences (Patten 130). She points to Wilson and Patterson’s English university experiences as giving them a fresh perspective on the conflict, something she suggests is lacking in the other writers. However as can be noted in the biographies of the writers in this study, all have to one extent or another moved from their home in the North to experience very different perspectives and several, such as Madden and Anderson, have also experienced English academia in their years of studying creative writing. I would argue that all of the writers in this study have styles and themes that cannot be read in isolation from contextualising factors such as biography, artistic background, or the period into which they are writing. Understanding the contexts of

their writing expands the reading process to allow new perspectives on writers and their works. I would suggest that a new examination of their works would open up readings that would allow them to escape the confines of supposed realist or liberal humanist paradigms; to label and dismiss them as for example Patten and Kennedy-Andrews have done in their critiques of Beckett, does a disservice to a nuanced novel that was groundbreaking in its time and has much to tell us not only of the historical period in which it is set but of the ways in which war I has impacted upon the Northern Irish consciousness.

Jennifer Johnston has highlighted the vicious circle that can occur between publishing houses and critics whereby women's writing can be disadvantageously classified. Johnston argues that early criticism of her writing led to her being considered through the Anglo-Irish Big House genre in a negative way which ignored her experimental style and by doing so led to her being erroneously considered as a woman writing "romantic novels" that were no longer relevant or appropriate to the current climate (York: Lazenblatt 43). Although the majority of contemporary criticisms of her work have moved beyond this framework, there are still echoes of these concepts to be found in reviews of her writing. In addition Johnston has noted that her particular style of writing, which uses dialogue, internal monologues, metaphor, imagery and other ways of referencing the issues relating to the Troubles that are less overt than many of her male contemporaries, has meant that she has been side-lined as an author of women's fiction by American publishers. She states:

my books are read in American universities but they are not sold in the United States. [...] Because as far as they are concerned, I'm not writing Irish novels [...]but] in departments where there would be a woman professor of Irish literature, you find my books and you find people reading them and you find people writing theses about them. (York: Lazenblatt 44)

Johnston argues that this is because of her "themes and approach to Ireland", thus her work has not been given credit for its highly original postmodern approach to the ways in which the violent past continues to impact her characters in their present day lives. This oversight as to the purposes behind her writing and the ways in which it can be interpreted are central to this thesis. I have chosen writers who have been ignored or misrepresented and tried to show how their work can be revitalised by a new critical framework that places their writing back into the centre of Northern Irish canons as

significant voices representing important issues thus far not considered by Irish critical circles.

Women have struggled within the publishing industry and against the critical reception of their work to become understood and accepted as they step beyond the confines of what has gone before. Sadly it has been an uphill struggle for the novelists and short story writers from Northern Ireland, which has left writers such as Mary Beckett and Linda Anderson on the sidelines as their work does not conform to the expectations of the period into which they were writing. In a similar way, more established writers such as Madden and Johnston, find their experimental novels often overlooked as critics seek to make generalisations about their work and fit their writing into traditional critical paradigms. The focus of both anthologies and critical works too often veers towards historicising the Troubles with a nod to token women's fiction, which has led to many writers being sidelined or ignored completely, therefore leaving their work to disappear from publication. New writers such as Robert McLiam Wilson, Colin Bateman and Glenn Patterson are praised for their experimental engagement with the Troubles, but interesting as these writers may be, it is unfortunate that this excludes powerful female equivalents such as Anna Burns, who has produced the very kind of explorative and subversive writing described by Patten in her search for new voices within Northern Irish women's fiction. In each of the chapters that follow, a short section will be dedicated to an overview of the chosen writers within this thesis to show the extent of their work and the ways in which their work has been received. What will be noticeable from these sections will be the quality of their writing and how often it has been misunderstood or ignored. By looking at their work through the critical perspective of trauma theory it is possible to show alternative modes of mapping their themes, concepts and stylistic choices, which expands the readings of their novels and short stories both individually and as a whole, and therefore re-positions their writing as important voices within the Northern Irish canon.

Writing Northern Ireland's Trauma

The background to the concept of trauma and its multiple definitions has several implications that influence its application with respect to Northern Ireland. The language of trauma is burdened by the fact that it came into the public arena through legal and medical discourses. Within these frameworks the traumatised individual is

classified as a victim who must prove the legally or medically viable ‘truth’ of the events that occurred, by using facts that can be externally verified. Their responses to trauma are thus categorised and given a diagnosis that is considered for procuring relief from the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Trauma is also called upon to prove itself on a social level, which has further implications for how it is perceived. The language of trauma can be a political tool to justify behaviour, or to claim victimhood. By using trauma in this way the reality of the events can be lost along with an understanding of the consequences for individuals and society. Only by looking at the complexities of trauma in a new way is it possible to gain some understanding of its impact. Fiction can be an effective way of moving outside the public discourses of events, particularly when it moves beyond realist narrative techniques, which creates a fluidity in language and imagery that allows for multiple readings. The novels chosen for this study approach the key traumas of Northern Ireland’s history and the traumatic events of the Troubles’ decades through metaphors, images, and tropes, which allows for a diverse exploration of the past and how it exists in public memory. This final section of the introduction will relate trauma theories and gender concepts to Northern Irish literature by précising the ensuing chapters.

The opening chapter to this thesis considers how trauma has emerged as a theoretical framework and how it may be applied to Northern Irish literature. It is important to understand the development of trauma theory by bearing in mind its emergence in the early work of Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet, before examining the way these concepts have been utilised by contemporary trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth and Jenny Edkins. Freud’s writing highlights how trauma is experienced as a repeating of the primary event, which leads him to conclude that the event itself is repressed from the conscious mind. Caruth expands this concept by considering how the nature of the traumatic event is such that it remains unprocessed by the symbolic coding of narrative and thus is an unknowable event that is best expressed as a missing experience. These key considerations are at the heart of the five novels in this study as the writers struggle to find ways of narrating the experience of trauma and its continual effect, not only on individuals, but throughout generations and the nation as a whole. By understanding the key themes and principles employed by trauma theorists, it is possible to move toward seeing how their ideas may be applied to the Troubles and the literary texts that respond to this time period. Although trauma theory has historically been connected by the theorists mentioned above to shell-shock, the Holocaust, and the Vietnam War, it may

also be seen more broadly as an expression of individual and collective encounters with death, the fear of death and the splitting of identity when it encounters an event that destroys its understanding of the world. Trauma can be experienced and discussed on an individual and on a collective basis and this chapter considers how these two arenas converge, which is important when exploring novels and stories that utilise individual traumas to explore the traumatised national psyche, as do the works discussed here. The creation of Northern Ireland as a separate entity and the constant years of violence and death since its inception has led to individual and national trauma; understanding how theorists have explored other traumas of war can help to make sense of this.

The second chapter performs a close reading of the work of Mary Beckett, an influential figure in Northern Irish prose fiction. She is an important example of how women's writing examines the beginning of the Troubles and her work depicts how historical traumas can return to haunt future generations. During the post-WWII years writers were exploring questions of identity, of what it meant to be living in a politically separated region of Ireland, and of the clash between modern and traditional worlds such as the disappearing traditions nostalgically portrayed by writers like Sam Hanna Bell, or the emerging modernism of John Hewitt. Mary Beckett captures this sense of a changing era by highlighting the transformative impact of war upon landscape and identity. *Give Them Stones* (1987) her Belfast based novel, looks specifically at the Second World War and the Troubles from the narrative perspective of a wonderfully-drawn female protagonist who fights against a patriarchal society to express her views on work and politics. Freud's work on the burning child can be utilised to explain the trauma of Beckett's protagonist in her short story "The Belfast Woman" (1980) which considers generational traumas since Partition through the metaphor of the loss of the home as a loss of identity. Beckett's writing is an important resource for understanding the effect of the Troubles on women, and she gives voices to the women of the not-so-quiet years between and during the War of Independence, the World Wars, the Civil War and the Troubles, to show how deeply war impacts communities and individuals.

Chapter three focuses on the years at the height of the Troubles through the novels and short stories of Linda Anderson. Anderson critiques negative representations of women and considers ways of eschewing the patriarchal politics of war. *Cuckoo* (1988) explores representations of the female, particularly as it relates to the protagonist's positioning of herself as a Northern Irish nationalist Protestant woman, and contrasts the

Troubles to world-wide issues such as the anti-nuclear protests and Civil Rights. This novel explores trauma through the breaking down of the narrative into non-linear sequences. Anderson's challenging style bridges the social realism of Beckett's writing and the postmodern style of writers like Anna Burns. Anderson structures her narrative in fragments that tell the story in a patchwork fashion of voices and events. The story she tells is a response to trauma and grief and Anderson considers how women in particular may respond to trauma by utilising her protagonist's body as the primary site of her trauma. Her story circles around the difficulty of forming a narrative beyond this physical engagement. There is a re-visiting of the trauma alongside a refusal or inability to 'tell' the story of the trauma, which remains a gap in the narrative that can only be told using displacement, thus suggesting that the full story remains unknowable. Anderson's other writing can be read alongside this novel to enhance an understanding of the difficulties of narrating trauma.

The fourth chapter compares and contrasts two authors who were writing in the later years of the Troubles throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Deirdre Madden and Jennifer Johnston share a common bond in their focus on the traumatised female perspective. Although the engagement with iconic images of the Troubles in Johnston's *The Gingerbread Woman* (2000) and Madden's *One By One in the Darkness* (1996) can help explicate the fragmentation of identity to comment on individual and social trauma, it is in two specific novels, *The Birds of the Innocent Wood* (1988) and *The Invisible Worm* (1991) that they converge in their conceptualisation of national trauma. As a way of exploring generational trauma, Madden and Johnston perform a re-examination of the Irish Gothic Big House genre by considering how its tropes and themes can engage with gender, identity, and contemporary politics. The strange world that Madden explores in *The Birds of the Innocent Wood* has a magical quality that is often associated with the other-worldliness of Irish fairy-tales and myth. Setting is important and the telling of the trauma is enacted amidst metaphor and fable to show the problems of narrating Ireland's past. The traumas of the female protagonist and her male counterpart are explored through her fascination with mirrors, the symbol of the birds and their association with eggs and nests. Madden expands these metaphors through her use of the gothic trope of doubles, which is also echoed in the twinning of the plotline. Johnston also explores the doubling of her protagonists to break down the binarisms of gender and national politics. Madden and Johnston both explore the gothic trope of incest as a way of expressing national trauma, however they do so in very different

ways. Johnston portrays the abuses of patriarchy through the father's dominance and rape of his young daughter. Madden creates a complex interweaving of family connections, which can be read as either unknown or known incestuous relationships between three generations of families. As with Johnston's *The Invisible Worm*, Madden's novel considers how the Ascendancy period was an initial trauma in Irish history, which has subsequently become a repressed memory that continuously resurfaces in future generations.

Post-trauma is at the centre of the final chapter on Anna Burns' novel *No Bones* (2001) which is a postmodern overview of the Troubles written after the Good Friday Agreement. The novel works through style and content to directly engage with emotional responses toward horrific events within collective memory. The use of dates in the chapter titles is highly significant as they draw parallels between the events experienced by the characters and the wider political events, which were key historical moments and thus sites of memory within Northern Ireland. For example the first chapter "Thursday, 1969" opens with: "The Troubles started on a Thursday. At six o'clock at night. At least that's how Amelia remembered it" (Burns 1). This chapter goes on to describe the rioting in the Falls and Ardoyne area on the 14th and 15th August 1969, not as it has been historically documented but as it might be seen through the eyes and logic of a young child, thus making the public event a personal experience. Burns uses similar defamiliarisation techniques when she switches to the voice of a psychotic character called Vincent, and to the events surrounding Amelia's breakdown, thus allowing the reader to understand the debilitating results of trauma. The narrative achieves empathy with those who experience trauma, while refusing any simplistic interpretation of events. Burns' postmodern style highlights the fragmentation and dissociation experienced by its traumatised characters. The final chapter "A Peace Process, 1994" comments on the events preceding the signing of the Belfast Agreement using slapstick comedy to explore the antics of her key characters brought back together for a boat trip to Rathlin Island. Her use of character, plot, perspective and metaphor all work to destabilise the narrative and unsettle the reader. Like Madden and Johnston, Burns considers a variety of tropes such as incest and rape to explore individual and social trauma and utilises the absurd, the grotesque and carnivalesque, thus leaving the reader shocked and uncomfortable. This novel engages with the subject of the Troubles as a whole entity by considering it from its inception until the beginning of political

unity: by exploring gender and identity as important key issues, the novel serves as a testimony to the trauma of living in Northern Ireland during the Troubles.

These chapters work together to establish a dialogue between trauma theory and Northern Irish women's writing in ways that are mutually illuminating. The intention of the opening chapter is to consider how trauma theory may be understood and utilised in explorations of Northern Ireland's Troubles. The last four chapters perform the two-fold tasks of elucidating trauma theory alongside discussions of the various novels and short stories. The chapters move chronologically throughout Northern Irish history by focusing specifically on the four key decades of the Troubles, while keeping an awareness of how the Partition and Second World War find echoes within the Troubles. They progress through depictions of the shocking impact of trauma in the early years, to the deepening understanding of the results of a prolonged exposure to trauma in the height of the Troubles, and the attempt to find a way of narrating the horrors of war in the period that may be termed post-trauma. The styles of writing employed by the authors studied here appear to become *more* complex and multi-stranded in subsequent years of the Troubles, thus suggesting that engagement with trauma requires a variety of writing techniques and complex characterisations in its dialogue with traumatic events. By highlighting gender, identity and memory issues throughout, it is possible to gain an understanding of the way women prose writers have created a body of writing which expresses their understanding of the Troubles, their engagement with historical representations of the national identity in crisis, and their need to use a variety of narrative techniques in order to depict the echoes of historical and recent collective traumas in the ongoing crisis of their protagonists.

Chapter One: Engaging with Trauma Theory

This chapter considers the theoretical background to and development of trauma theory in order to demonstrate its applicability to literature depicting the Northern Ireland Troubles. It will begin by examining how the study of trauma evolved from Freud's work on hysteria and shell-shock, to develop as a term connected to the Holocaust, before expanding into socio-political and literary studies. It was during the 1980s that trauma emerged not only as a psychological term, but as a theoretical framework that could be utilised to engage with literature, thereby enabling an understanding of the processes of memory and politics during times of crisis. Although it was first considered as part of the research into hysteria, trauma acquired its embryonic definition alongside the term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) during the Vietnam War. Subsequently the conceptualisation of trauma has developed to include not just individual experiences of violence and death, but also what can be termed structural violence; the fear that can be created by unequal power relationships such as police or state violence against minority groups or individuals (Hamber and Lewis 1997). There are numerous key ideas posited in the consideration of trauma: that trauma can be experienced on an individual or collective basis; that it exists beyond a linear spatial position; that it involves issues of definition and of containment; that it is first and foremost experienced through the body and remains deeply connected to the senses; that it is not a response to normal experience, which suggests it is not easily transposed into language; and that there is an effect on the sense of self, which suggests a splitting from the pre- and post- traumatised identity. By understanding the key issues involved in trauma theory and how it has evolved it is possible to expand upon the ways that it can be utilised in discussion of the Northern Irish Troubles and to gain a deeper analysis of the expression of trauma in the novels and stories written from and out of that period.

Freud

Sigmund Freud first looked at trauma in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) where, intrigued by the need to find a way of verbalising the hidden traumas of his patients, he hypothesised that all neuroses were linked to repressed sexual traumas. Freud had been a student of the French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot who developed the hypothesis that physical

trauma was the basis for all hysteria. Charcot did not think hysteria was applicable only to women as his studies of men from all walks of life produced theories relating to post-war and industrial-related traumas.⁵ Freud developed his theories of trauma through a number of his essays including: *Moses and Monotheism* (1937-9), *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1933), *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), and *The Uncanny* (1919). His work on repetition and compulsion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* highlights the need to repeat traumatic events, although this may mean transferring the emotional responses to the trauma onto another catalyst (as for example seeing the analyst as the initiator of the trauma). This is frequently an attempt by the patient to repress an emotional response that is too painful to remember. Freud considers how the mind finds it difficult to process what it has perceived, therefore the ego becomes split as the trauma is forced into the id (unconscious) where it remains repressed, but continuously resurfaces in repetitive attempts to recognize the trauma. As Freud states:

The patient can go on spinning a thread of such association, till he is brought up against some thought, the relaxation of which, to what is repressed, becomes so obvious that he is compelled to repeat his attempt at repression. (Freud 149)

Freud is suggesting that, although the individual is unable to express it consciously, trauma is constantly warring within the unconscious. Once the conscious mind perceives it, the trauma is buried again until such a time as it surfaces through another unconscious association. Repetition can take on the form of dreams, story-telling or even hallucinations. The drive to repeat the trauma is linked by Freud to the death drive. Neither pleasure, nor reality principles account for repeating pain but in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud considers the need to repeat pain as part of the death drive, which acts in opposition to sexual drives; this is not striving for pleasure but to get back to the pre-life state. This Freudian concept is used by Peter Brooks in his analysis of narrative structures and the desire for narrative closure. His *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (1984) is an example of how psychoanalytical theory has been developed in the analysis of literature and how narrative may be considered to be a search for interpretation, for identity and for decoding the past. The repetitious nature of trauma is central to trauma literature and appears in all five of the novels in this study. The return of the repressed trauma is discussed fully in Beckett's writing, but

⁵ Charcot discussed these ideas in his public lectures, which are published in *Clinical Lectures on Disease of the Nervous System* (1889).

is also considered in Johnston and Madden's use of doubles, Burns' hallucinatory psychotic episodes and Anderson's repetitious behavioural patterns.

Freud was aware that trauma could be either a bodily experience, or one experienced in the psyche, or both. It was during his work on religion that Freud produced several deductions upon which he based his theory of trauma. "We give the name of traumas to those impressions, experienced early and later forgotten, to which we attach such great importance in the aetiology of the neuroses" (Freud, *Moses* 72). All five writers in this study engage, not only with the belated experience of the trauma, but with how the trauma exists in the physical bodies of their protagonists. This coalesces with Freud's emphasis on the role of the body in trauma: "The traumas are either experiences on the subject's own body or sense perceptions, mostly of something seen and heard – that is experiences or impressions" (Freud, *Moses* 74). This may account for the latent position of the person's responses toward trauma; the trauma is described by Freud as "forgotten" by the conscious mind, only to re-appear later in the form of neurosis. Freud suggests that the effects of trauma are two-fold: positive, where there are attempts to bring knowledge of the trauma to the surface of the conscious mind, that is "to make it real", or negative, where various defensive reactions are set in place and the person becomes fixated or in avoidance, which results in a "compulsion to repeat". Both negative and positive responses to trauma suggest a "compulsive" quality by creating a "state within a state, an inaccessible party"; a place in the unconscious where the trauma is held separate from the person's everyday conscious workings, yet where it exists to influence the person's worldview (Freud, *Moses* 76). In total, Freud saw trauma as a neurosis that created "alterations of the ego comparable to scars" (Freud, *Moses* 77). This may explain why physical scars are used in literature as an outward expression of the inner trauma as, for example, in Beckett's "A Belfast Woman" and Madden's *One By One in the Darkness*. Freud suggested that although there is often a period of latency during which the person may appear not to have any symptoms, the scars eventually become apparent:

This latter illness may also be looked upon as an attempt at cure – as an effort once more to reconcile with the rest those portions of the ego that have been split off by influence of the trauma and to unite them into a powerful whole vis-à-vis the external world. (Freud, *Moses* 77-8)

Freud therefore thought that trauma caused psychological illness and that the symptoms, which eventually surfaced as a result of the person's responses to the trauma, could be cured during prolonged periods of analysis. Johnston's trope in her *Invisible Worm* of uncovering a hidden summerhouse as the site of the trauma is therefore an example of how a literary trope can develop an understanding of recovering hidden trauma into the conscious mind. The protagonists, through bearing witness to their traumas, were able to come to a place of acceptance of their repressed memories. Freud's work was to help the patient bring the trauma to the surface of their conscious mind and prevent the fragmentation of their ego. He suggests that the ego's response to trauma was an attempt to defend itself from the knowledge of the trauma, but that the partial return of the repressed results in a splitting of the ego and the development of a neurosis. This may explain the reoccurring use of doubles and multifarious voices in trauma narratives, as for example in Madden's *Birds of the Innocent Woods* and Burns' *Little Constructions* where authors find literary tropes to engage with depictions of the fracturing of the self.

Freud's work moves beyond individual psychology towards collective consciousness in his writing on his Jewish background. In his three essay volume *Moses and Monotheism* Freud suggests that historical trauma remains in the background of religious belief and can be used to understand what he terms neurotic behaviour because of "its enormous power in the same way as a neurotic compulsion in our individual patients" (Freud, *Moses* 55). The religious changes that occurred after Moses' death were, according to Freud, an attempt by a group of people to repress the truth of their origins and reunite their belief systems. They did so by producing a mythology that would hide their traumatic history. This theory is particularly relevant when considering Madden's *The Birds of the Innocent Woods* where the repression of the division caused by the Ascendancy is described using mythical language and gothic tropes such as doubling and incest. This is group psychology at work; an entire nation or tribe responding to their traumatic background. This theory can be used to discuss how second generation trauma survivors, such as Holocaust survivors, have shown post traumatic symptoms. It could also suggest that, over a prolonged period of trauma, subsequent generations could be seen to be doubly impacted by the post-traumatic responses they have 'inherited' from their parents and by their responses to their own experiences of trauma. This concept is of interest when considering trauma in Ireland as a cross-generational response, and may explain why authors such as Madden, Johnston and Beckett look to

historical traumas when discussing their present day situations. Ireland is historically a divided land, which has memorialised its violent upheavals and colonial traumas in its culture and its politics. These traumas are, in Freudian terms, inherited at birth and resurface in dreams, which he argues are a pre-linguistic form of communication that hold generational memories. Literature therefore that exposes the patriarchal power base, and suggests historical fragmentation would be engaging with Freudian principles. When exploring the current effects of the Northern Troubles it is therefore important to analyse the influence of generational traumas from past divisions and wars.

Janet

An alternative view of trauma was posited by Pierre Janet, a contemporary of Freud who analysed how words and images shaped or became attached to memories, and highlighted the body's role in processing trauma. In *Psychological Healing* Janet suggests that the mind separates the traumatised image of the self from other versions of the self. He considers that trauma is not held as memories, but as gaps in memories. The individual, once aware of the missing narrative of the trauma, feels a need to integrate the trauma into his sense of self. Janet suggests that the individual does this through the return of the bodily experiences and that this happens through dreams and flashbacks: the body therefore is an important part of trauma narratives. Janet believes that the sensory system of the body is separate from the conscious mind, therefore sensory perceptions such as smells can bypass the conscious mind to trigger bodily responses similar to previous times of heightened emotions held within the unconscious mind. This is particularly true of traumatic memories and may explain why so many narratives consider trauma by using physical, sensory, or embodied images and metaphors. Anderson in particular turns to the trope of the body as a way of engaging with traumatic memories, but it is prominent in the way all writers in this study discuss trauma. Janet also contends that during moments when the trauma attempts to resurface to the conscious mind, the narrative remains missing from the bodily re-enactments of the trauma and thus the trauma remains dissociated from the subjective 'I', from the individual's sense of self as an integral whole. The attempts by the conscious mind to recover these lost moments will lead to the individual becoming exhausted and disturbed. Severe cases of trauma can result in the individual splitting into separate consciousnesses (multiple personalities). This concurs with Freud's ideas on doubling,

and emphasises the need to use multiplicity as a trope and as a narrative perspective in trauma literature.

Janet saw the main obstacle to recovery as the imperfect form taken by traumatic memories, which he describes as “hidden” or “lost”. He notes how the patients he studied were often able to recall such memories through dreams, automatic writing or during an induced somnambulist (hypnotic) state. This led Janet to conclude that the memories were not lost but “latent”; they were not consciously known but were still reactive and could become activated again through dreams. The memories caused symptoms because they were subconscious: “such fixed ideas are dangerous because they are no longer under the control of the personality, because they belong to a group of phenomena which have passed beyond the dominion of the conscious will” (Janet 596). Trauma literature describes this negativity and often works to demonstrate how it changes both the physical and mental well-being of the person. Burns in particular demonstrates the physical responses of her protagonists to their suppressed mental traumas. In *No Bones* the conscious will in her characters works to suppress the memories of the death of their friends and their own near-death experiences, but the ghosts of the dead return to haunt the present day as if they were actual physical beings. The body therefore relives the site of its trauma by reproducing the physical panic and horror experienced in its encounter with the trauma.

One of the most important areas of Janet’s work addresses how traumatic memories are stored. In *Psychological Healing* Janet cites the work of Charcot (1892: 94, 95) to suggest that the response to trauma was induced because, “memory of the event gave rise to very natural reflections concerning its possible consequences, concerning the wounds, the losses of power, and the weaknesses which it might entail” (Janet 596). Janet however makes a distinction between these observations and his own theory. He suggests that there is no subsequent *conscious* response to the fear of loss of power following a trauma because the individual does not have a narrative concerning the trauma:

The actual memory of the happening was constituted by a system of psychological and physiological phenomena, of images and movements, of a multiform character. This system, persistent in the mind, soon began to encroach. By association, it annexed a number of images and movements which had at first been independent of its influence. Thus enriched, prepotent in an environment of other thoughts that had been enfeebled by the general

depression, it became able to realise itself automatically without passing through the intermediate stages of ideation and suggestion, and thus gave rise to actions, dispositions, sufferings, and delusions, of various kinds. (Janet 597)

Janet is saying that trauma is not held in the conscious mind as a straightforward narrative that can be interacted with or responded to in any form, but instead trauma remains in the unconscious mind in a series of impressions, visual images, or bodily responses that are not connected to a narrative of the traumatic event itself. Traumatic memories are responded to through a process of association when the images and so forth connected to the trauma are re-experienced, which can be from external stimuli such as a visual image or cluster of images similar enough to the traumatic one to induce an automatic response to that of the trauma. The individual is unable to understand or control their unconscious bodily response or their emotional response to the triggering of their traumatic memories; they are not remembering the trauma but are producing an associative pattern of responses to the trauma. This may explain why some writers such as Burns with her use of the fantastic and grotesque, choose to replace the moment of the trauma with a metaphor or, like Madden with her use of doubling, to displace the trauma onto another event, object or character. This is different to Freud's theory that the memory of the trauma has been sublimated into the unconscious mind merely to return as neurotic symptoms responding to the repression of the memory. Janet is instead saying that there never was a conscious memory of the trauma; traumatic memory is a pre-conscious, pre-linguistic experience of the event. In this case a realist narrative of the event would not take into account its lack of signification; to describe the trauma using Janet's theory would preclude using the symbolic or an experimental style and format. Janet however, like Freud, also believes that there can be a 'cure' for the symptomatic responses to trauma. He considers that by accessing the images and so forth through various means such as hypnosis which bypassed the conscious mind, it was possible to create a narrative of the trauma and to suggest a conscious memory of the event. When this could be 'recovered' through the exploration and release of the unconscious, the patient was able to find better ways of expressing the trauma than the previous uncontrollable emotional and bodily responses. This is extremely important when looking at trauma in literature such as for example the novels of Burns and Madden, which eschew straightforward narrative depictions of trauma for a metaphorical or allegorical portrayal. Janet's theory of the existence of a 'subconscious' beyond an individual's awareness, his idea that this is the place that

holds traumatic memory, and his theories on dissociation have had a major impact on subsequent theories on trauma and thus how trauma is portrayed in fiction.

Establishing the Concepts and Definition of Trauma

The concepts of trauma described above remained as the main influential thinking on trauma until the mid-twentieth century when an official definition of trauma set out medical guidelines in response to the growing awareness of the effects of trauma. Despite its early emergence as a way of thinking about female hysteria, during the early twentieth century trauma theory in its embryonic form was developing mainly into a study of war neuroses. As Bessel van der Kolk notes: “Between 1895 and 1974, the study of trauma centred almost exclusively on its effect on males” (van der Kolk et al 29-30). Abram Kardiner’s *The Traumatic Neuroses of War* (1941) was the first major detailed study of the symptoms and conditions associated with post-war trauma and many of the findings are echoed in the first official definition of PTSD by the American Psychiatric Association (APA), which was precipitated during the 1970s and 1980s when work on trauma moved into studies of victims of sexual and physical abuse, and of the Vietnam War veterans.⁶ It was the symptoms set down during such studies that enabled the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, third edition (DSM-III) to first include a medical diagnosis of trauma in 1980, which created the common language and generic features that influence all subsequent understandings of trauma.⁷ This diagnosis was achieved by utilising symptomatic responses to what was defined within a specific remit as traumatic experiences; experiences that (as was later qualified) were considered outside of, or beyond, what could be termed ‘normal’. In the revised edition, DSM-III-R (1987), the APA categorises the broad range of disorders under the terms of dissociation, somatisation, conversion, borderline personality, and post-traumatic stress disorders. In 1994 the DSM-IV (4th edition) moved away from diagnoses of external stress factors towards the responses of the individual. As Norris and Hamblen highlight, the changing definitions of trauma and PTSD impact on how trauma has been treated and perceived, particularly in its move away from event to response: “the definition has been made narrower by requiring a subjective response of fear, helplessness, and horror” (Norris and Hamblen 64). What is significant in these

⁶ Examples of important studies include Ann Burgess and Linda Holstrom *Rape Trauma Syndrome* (1974) Murray Strauss and Richard Gelles (1977; 79) and Judith Herman (1981).

⁷ The DSM-III defined trauma using words relating to distress, significant symptoms and recognisable stresses. More information on this can be found in Brett: van der Kolk et al, 1996. 124.

changes of definition is the shift in focus from external to internal, from outside causes to individual responses. The 1994 definition however would also appear to open up the categories of events that could be classified as traumatic, while also highlighting the physical impact of trauma. This brings to mind Janet's earlier work and the importance of the body in considering the impact of trauma.

From its earliest understanding, trauma highlights the role of the body and the concept of scars or wounding. The semantics of trauma originate from Greek and Latin roots and relate to bodily injuries: *traumatos*, "results in a state of being wounded" (Wilson 12). This early association of the word with physical wounding remains within the psychic traumatic thus retaining the emphasis on physicality when considering psychobiological trauma. The responses to trauma are thus seen as two-fold: biological (neurophysical) and psychological (on memory, personality, subjectivity, etc.).⁸ Trauma can also be seen to trigger personality and emotional changes alongside changes in belief systems such as religious faith or personal identity. This may be why many writers show a break in the personality of the character between their pre- and post-traumatised selves. John Wilson in his 2004 study of PTSD goes so far as to say that, "[t]he whole person is wounded by trauma" so that trauma is "multi-dimensional in terms of post traumatic psychological functioning, influencing motivation, goal striving and levels of consciousness about the self in the world" (Wilson 11, 12). This two-fold response to trauma is noted in the symptoms (as laid out in the DSM-IV) that are associated with PTSD, as for example, the persistent re-experiencing of the event in dreams and flashbacks, the physical or emotional avoidance of stimuli and the numbing of general responses, problems with sleep patterns and increased arousal, and in the physiological or psychological responses to external or internal symbolic cues that bring back the traumatic event.⁹ As Wilson highlights, the properties of the trauma are twofold in that its symptoms are multiple and interrelated and may be seen to be debilitating both for the body and the psyche as the trauma is re-experienced over a significant period of time:

⁸ When PTSD was originally defined in 1980 the biological components were unknown and thus diagnosis was performed using psychological symptoms. See Yehuda and McFarlane *Psychobiology of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder* or medical and psychiatry journals for up-to-date studies.

⁹ PTSD symptoms are drawn into five interrelated areas: re-experiencing trauma, avoidance and coping patterns, hyperarousal, self and ego processes, and interpersonal patterns such as bonding and love. PTSD can vary in severity and how it develops over time, as for example, acute periods, delayed onset and chronic disorder patterns. (Wilson: Wilson & Keane, 2004)

It is useful to understand PTSD as a normal, organismically based response pattern to extremely stressful life events. PTSD is a *psychobiological syndrome* that comprises of an interrelated set of symptoms that cohere to form a prolonged stress reaction to trauma. (Wilson 11)

These symptoms of responses to trauma are at the heart of trauma literature and authors utilise a variety of techniques to demonstrate the ways in which their protagonists are expressing their post-trauma identities. As for example, Beckett and Madden's protagonists demonstrate, the trope of wounding has become a metaphor in literature to show the psychic distress of the trauma as a bodily scar, which highlights the permanent change to the whole person.

In the years following these definitions, trauma has become incorporated into multi-field studies and publications, which in turn has led to trauma studies moving from the medical field into literary, philosophical, and psychoanalytical studies. Its definition is no longer only concerned with a publicly applicable standard that can be used for legal or medical purposes, but has progressed instead towards a fluidity of perception and definition. The official definition of trauma has been explored through trauma studies in such a way as to open new understandings of what trauma may mean in the modern world. As Anne Whitehead has noted, "trauma theory has provided novelists with new ways of conceptualising trauma and has shifted attention away from the question of what is remembered of the past to how and why it is remembered" (Whitehead 3). The definition has opened to include not just an individual suffering from one or multiple moments of trauma, but may also be seen to be experienced by a collective group. It may also be noted to be the result of the *absence* of certain events as described by Brandon Hamber and Sharon Lewis in their work on trauma in South Africa:

In much of the academic literature, both physical and psychological components are included in the definition of violence, and definitions of violence can be seen to include not only abuse, but also neglect. This infers two dimensions of violence: acts of commission and acts of omission. (Hamber and Lewis, 1997)

Trauma is strongly associated with acts of violence and abuse of power, but as Hamber and Lewis highlight, other events or lack of events can also be seen as trauma. Examples of this are found in the literature of Anderson and Burns who engage with the secondary trauma that can occur when traumatised individuals can no longer fulfil their caring relationship roles and the consequences of this for their families. This is also a particularly pertinent point when considering long-term trauma for individuals and

groups. These new applications of ideas surrounding trauma has changed the way it is represented, which in turn can lead to a deeper understanding of trauma and its re-occurring patterns.

Developing Trauma Theory

The opening up of the study of trauma into multiple fields has led to its expansion within literary studies, and Yale University can be seen as the origin of much of what we now consider as trauma studies. Yale scholars began researching into trauma in the 1980s and 1990s, specifically as it relates to Holocaust memory and testimony. The key figures in trauma work at Yale university were Geoffrey Hartman, Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman; they are now joined by Cathy Caruth. It originated with Laub who, while working in Yale Medical School as a psychiatrist, began to compile interviews with survivors of the Holocaust as part of a television project with Laurel Vlock, which is now the large-scale video library of personal testimonies known as the Fortunoff Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. Hartman in a recent interview noted that the creation of the archive was happening at the same time as the work on the Vietnam War and the establishment of a medical definition of trauma, which suggests a multi-faceted approach to modern trauma theory:

Trauma studies then, did not influence directly the establishment and work of the Yale archives of the 1980s and 1990s. Yet our success in recording and preserving a significant corpus of unconstrained, freely offered witness accounts provided an impetus. (Hartman, *Interview* 156)

The role played by Yale theorists is important in their influence on how trauma theory was to be perceived in literary studies as, alongside the development of this archive was the development of trauma through the lens of post-structuralist and deconstructive theories, which in turn has an impact on the construction of the literature of trauma. Paul de Man's literary critical theories were influencing the work of other theorists at Yale and his writing can be seen (albeit in different echoes) alongside the thinking of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, and amongst others, influencing the work of Hartman, Felman and Caruth.

The dual influence of purpose behind Laub's collaborative publication with Felman places witnessing and language at the heart of trauma studies. Felman ("a professional interpreter of texts") and Laub ("a professional interpreter of people") highlight the key

issue in their “Foreword” to *Testimony* (1992) of the relationships between spoken and written language, art and memory, and narrative and history (Felman and Laub xiii). What these theorists highlight is the relationship of trauma to its specificity of context; to its geographical space and time. Therefore to understand the literature of trauma from a specific event such as the Northern Irish Troubles, it is important for the reader to place the writing within its time-frame and geography: “As readers, we are witnesses precisely to these questions we do not own and do not yet understand, but which summon and beseech us from within the literary texts” (Felman and Laub xiii). The questions they consider are in response to the traumatic testimonies of the Holocaust survivors. They highlight the need to look at language, testimony or texts, within the perspective of the space and time in which they are constructed or witnessed:

In order to gain insight into the significance and impact of the context on the text, the empirical context needs not just to be *known*, but to be *read*; to be read in conjunction with, and as part of, the reading of the text. We thus propose to show how the basic and legitimate critical demand for *contextualization of the text* itself needs to be complemented, simultaneously, by the less familiar and yet necessary work of *textualization of the context*; and how this shuttle movement or this shuttle reading in the critic’s work – the very *tension between textualization and contextualization* – might yield new avenues of insight, both into the texts at stake and into their context – the political, historical, and biographical realities with which the texts are dynamically involved and within which their particular creative possibilities are themselves inscribed. (Felman and Laub xv)

They are foregrounding how contextuality is a necessary part of the reading process, of how the circumstances of creating a narrative influence the words on the page and their subsequent meaning in different times and places. They, like others such as Hartman, revert to the image of weaving to aid an understanding of the process. The use of postmodern, post-structural and deconstructive thought, alongside a developing understanding of the effects of trauma, creates a new understanding of trauma; of how it might be understood, not just on a personal level, but of how it interacts with collective influences. By placing historical and political events alongside narratives of the events, that is ‘readings’ alongside their ‘contexts’, it is possible to gain a better understanding of the dynamics at work in both fields. Felman and Laub highlight the importance of studying the literature of trauma by pointing to the ways in which their different approaches to trauma have helped them to develop an understanding and mutual theory about the relationship of art and witnessing. They go so far as to suggest that art forms

including literature may in some circumstances be the only way of capturing and passing on the story of trauma:

In considering, in this way, literature and art as a precocious mode of witnessing – of accessing reality – when all other modes of knowledge are precluded, our ultimate concern has been with the preservation, in this book, both of the uniqueness of experience in the face of its theorization, and the shock of the unintelligible in the face of the attempt at its interpretation; with the preservation, that is, of reality itself in the midst of our own efforts at interpreting it and through the necessary process of its textualization. (Felman and Laub xx)

Trauma may be considered as a specific kind of experience, one that in its uniqueness has become unknowable to those who have no other similar experience with which to understand and express the trauma. There is no available language that can convey the trauma, which by definition is beyond everyday experience and therefore normal speech. Trauma theory thus highlights the problems of understanding or interpretation, of the unknowability of trauma, by considering how the experience of the trauma is different to other life experiences, and as such posits problems of signification and narration, as attempts are made to bear witness to the trauma. This may explain why literature focused on traumatic experiences often employs post-modern formats and metaphorical or experimental styles. This is the essence of the way that the various modes of thinking about trauma was beginning to weave itself into the fabric of literary theory.

Yale's influence in trauma studies continues in the work of Hartman who built on his *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814* (1964) throughout the 1980s and 1990s to include his concepts of "psychoaesthetics", which considers the interaction between Freud, Wordsworth and trauma. Hartman describes Wordsworth's writing on nature and childhood as a way of recovering an earlier identity by accessing a pre-trauma time before the French Revolution (Hartman 161).¹⁰ He describes how Wordsworth's engagement with trauma is both on a personal and a collective level; it is an arc following his personal psychological development while his national identity is also threatened. Hartman highlights the importance of language post-trauma both in its use on a collective and individual level. He sees an ambiguity between the need to refuse labels and named identities; although it may become part of the re-building process

¹⁰ There are similarities between Hartman's descriptions of Wordsworth's use of Nature in early childhood traumas to expose subsequent social traumas, and Seamus Heaney's early poetry as, for example, Heaney's "Death of Naturalist".

following trauma, creating definitions can also be destructive. In “Words and Wounding” for example, he describes how sounds can penetrate the ear in a traumatic way. This is not unlike Anderson’s turning of the term “words” into “swords” to emphasise how her protagonist felt damaged by the patriarchal language used to contain and disempower her female body (Anderson, *Cuckoo* 91). Hartman discusses Jean-Paul Sartre’s work on Jean Genet, suggesting words can become life-long curses: “the wounded name, that at first seemed rather special, leads into the crucial problem of self-identity and its relation to art and writing” (Hartman and O’Hara 278). Naming is therefore a specific kind of wounding, which is another point raised by Anderson when she describes how a character was re-named by her foster carers in an act that removed everything that defined her past identity (Anderson, *Cuckoo* 141). Hartman expands his concept of word-wounding to suggest that the reader can become harmed by the words on the page. His suggestion is that language can contaminate and that words can be weapons.¹¹ The telling of trauma is therefore an ethical consideration and this ought to be considered in the narrative process. This raises the dilemma as to whether there is a way to write about trauma that can create an empathy with the protagonist and an understanding of the events depicted without wounding the reader.

Hartman argues in his essay “On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies” that it may be impossible to have traumatic knowledge, which he suggests is a contradiction in terms. The idea that there can be no full understanding of trauma not only affects the critical analysis of trauma narratives, but also the attempt to define trauma. He considers traumatic events are “registered”, a phrase that equates to Janet’s idea that trauma is held in the bodily responses, rather than the conscious mind. His description of the registering of trauma uses words that equate it to the literary tropes and devices that can be utilised to convey the moment of trauma:

Something “falls” into the psyche, or causes it to “split”. There is an original inner catastrophe whereby/in which an experience that is not experienced (and so, apparently, not “real”) has an exceptional presence – is inscribed with a force proportional to the mediations punctured or evaded. (Hartman 537)

Once again trauma theory has produced the notion of “splitting” as part of the traumatic event. The importance of the splitting of the self through trauma is therefore a highly significant aspect of trauma, which is echoed in the variety of ways it has been revisited

¹¹ This links into his psychoanalytical theory of linguistic uncertainty and the distortion of knowledge through communication, particularly as it relates to trauma.

in the novels in this thesis. Although all five writers show fragmentation and splitting, it is in the work of Madden that this becomes a major theme and central to both plot and characterisation. Splitting is portrayed within the characters in these novels to suggest a differentiation between the pre-trauma and post-trauma selves. The psyche of the individual character may be shown to be split into multiple parts of the self: the character can also have a double, or be split into multiple overlapping versions of the same character. In all of these the narrative voice may also show signs of being split. Trauma literature tends toward a mode of writing that eschews definition either with respect to terminology and words, or for subjectivity (the 'I') for the reader who must accept the symbolic multiplicity of the text, not just as it exists in one reading, but as it may exist in multiple interpretations or readings. Johnston's writing in particular tends to focus on subjective splitting and her novel *The Gingerbread Woman* illustrates the difficulties of subjectivity in trauma narratives. In this novel Johnston's protagonist splits her character and writes her story with continual questions about the concept of "I". Trauma narratives thus engage with subjectivity by asking if it is possible to define the "I" of the story. This is important when considering how literature can explore trauma without direct confrontation with the actual traumatic event.

Hartman compounds his earlier theories to focus on how literature can, through its use of the symbolic and explorations of fractured subjectivity, develop a new experience of knowledge: one that is either indirectly or unconsciously understood, or one that remains known only as a multi-levelled cognition. This is important when looking at the ways that novelists use imagery and stylistic techniques to explore trauma. He suggests that it is only through the use of the "uncanny intensification" of the symbolic that there can be any understanding of certain truth in literature: "its convertability of literal and symbolic is the 'traumatising' already mentioned, which constantly shatters basic trust yet always, in a symbolic mode, picks up the pieces" (Hartman and O'Hara 291). Unlike trauma theorists such as Dominick LaCapra, Hartman does not see the symbolic as denying the truthfulness of narratives of actual events, but notes instead how it allows for a greater understanding of the traumatic experience. The only way to fully explore trauma is to weave a variety of literary techniques together, which Hartman illustrates through the story of Philomela who, on the violent removal of her tongue, weaves together strands of truth into a tapestry of past events to give voice to her trauma: "I venture, then, to define verbalised trauma as a compromise formation, as speech under the condition of speechlessness" (Hartman 170). Hartman highlights trauma's temporal

structure, symbolic nature and repetition-compulsion, which are issues also focused upon in other trauma theorists' writings. He is arguing that literature, written about and in response to trauma, holds within its structure and use of voice, an openness, or as he puts it a "referentiality", which is a pointing outward to new associative patterns outside of the textual meaning (Hartman and O'Hara 292). The difficulties in negotiating a narrative that is attempting to tell a story about an unknowable event necessitates a use of language and form that will multiply the meaning and thus aid the interpretation of experiences beyond comprehension. The very nature of trauma narrative and theory leads it into "the nearness of dream" or the symbolic, which defies chronological time structures and simplistic definitions of subjectivity. Hartman's theories are demonstrated in the novels and short stories, which play with form and style, and actively seek out symbolic language and imagery to find means of expression for trauma. These points are also raised by Cathy Caruth, who takes up Hartman's use of Jacques Lacan to explore the concept of meaning, and by Jenny Edkins in her creation of the concept of "trauma time" as a space that opens up new meanings particularly within the socio-political arenas.

Cathy Caruth and the Un/Knowability of Trauma

In *Trauma: Explorations of Memory* (1995) Cathy Caruth asks questions concerning "how trauma unsettles and forces us to rethink our notions of experience, and of communication" (Caruth 4). Caruth focuses on the unknowability of trauma, that is the way that trauma creates a break between social subjectivity and the individual's concept of subjectivity, because there is a lack of language or associative understanding of the traumatic event, which leaves the trauma embodied and without narrative signification. Trauma thus remains as a series of physical or sensory encounters, which are re-experienced in physical form in attempts to understand the event. By using expressions linked to the body it is possible to explore the physical memories of the trauma. As Hartman has previously suggested, trauma, because it lives in liminal spaces, cannot be expressed in objective language as 'normal' language does not have the words to express the trauma. Therefore trauma is best explored through the open fluidity of symbolic styles which allow space for the creation of meaning. This is a problem that is explored in the writing within this study as authors attempt to find experimental ways of engaging with trauma. Caruth acknowledges in her Preface to *Explorations* both the increasing interest in and use of trauma theory, and the need to explore further ways to

understand and relieve the sufferers of trauma: the key problem when studying trauma narratives is the interpretation or witnessing of memory. Narrating and witnessing trauma is a complex and difficult task requiring, as Caruth states, “a way that does not lose their impact, that does not reduce them to clichés or turn them all into versions of the same story” (Caruth vii). Caruth is suggesting here that attempting to turn the trauma into a narrative and exploring trauma is problematic, as it may lessen the reality of the horror of the actual event. This may be why authors such as Burns circumvent their descriptions of the traumatic event by using language, imagery and descriptions that deliberately shock and disturb the reader, while other authors may leave a gap to expose the unknowability of the event itself and prefer to focus on its impact upon the traumatised individual or community.

Caruth defines trauma in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) as, “a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event” (Caruth 4). Trauma is an unknowable experience and even the attempt to understand it by returning to the moment of trauma entails an acknowledgement that it has remained not fully experienced or known. This is interesting not just because Caruth is stating how it is only by leaving the site of trauma that the trauma can be belatedly experienced, but how the person’s narrative of the trauma (in this instance Freud’s) may directly reflect the process of repetition (Caruth 22). This may explain why within the same body of writing, or within the writer’s full body of work, there may be overlaps and repetitions in themes, imagery, descriptions of character, setting or plot. Caruth points to the debates surrounding postmodernism, which suggest that its unstable referentiality would disallow access not only to the Other’s past but to the past of the Self. Caruth postulates that trauma disrupts the notion that the past is a simple series of references and experiences. She links this to the unknowability and belatedness of traumatic memory and thus of traumatic history:

For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence. (Caruth 18)

Traumatic history is an absence of history and it is this very unknown that is experienced as trauma. There is a gap in the knowledge of the *when* of death for a survivor of, or witness to, the death of another. Linda Anderson portrays her characters caught in this moment of death and the gap in knowing: Fran in *Cuckoo* and Rosaleen in *To Stay Alive* revisit aspects of their grief and trauma, in such a way as to express to the reader how trauma leaves both the individual and the witness in the gap of traumatic unknowability. Caruth however does suggest that there may be a mutual lack of knowledge that allows for the witnessing of one traumatised individual with another's grief and trauma: "Through its very missing, his story, like hers, bears the impact of a trauma" (Caruth 40). It is the gap in their knowledge in which the trauma exists. This is illustrated in Jennifer Johnston's writing when her two protagonists find an understanding in which to bear witness to one another's trauma. Caruth's work on trauma theory is thus ground-breaking in its use of concepts of the self, the text, history and narrative.

Trauma prevents the narration of self within the symbolic order and therefore trauma remains beyond narration; it exists in the physicality of the body. This may explain why it is central to Anderson's writing where she engages with the female traumatised body, whilst utilising gender theories. There are overlaps between trauma theory and the thinking of gender theorists, particularly with the work of Julia Kristeva on the body and the subjectivity of self. Kristeva's writing focuses on the concept of the self as a semiotic core, which exists beyond the signified self that is created using social ordering. In her *Desire in Language* (1980) she uses Freudian and Lacanian principles to engage with the unconscious signification processes that may be utilised to create subjectivity in narrative form. If trauma intervenes in the signification of the self then it upsets the balance between the semiotic and the symbolic, for as Cecilia Sjöholm argues, "Kristeva's notion of subjectivity could be considered as a corrective to modern identity politics, undermining the notion of the stable self" (Sjöholm 4). In this way gender and trauma studies overlap in their explorations of the breaking down of the concept of the self. When Anderson's protagonist's identity fragments in her post-trauma period, she questions not only her world-view, but her concept of herself as a woman. Anderson shows how the specific trauma experienced by her character was connected to her gender identity and when her sense of self was fractured, this affected her understanding of her relationship to her body and her understanding of herself as a female subject. Sjöholm's research into Kristeva's work concerning the political use of

the body and self highlights how the body is a pre-linguistic domain. This is also explored by Kelly Oliver who states that Kristeva's concepts of the body are "situated in a pre-discursive domain" which, although it may be "intertwined with language", is not defined by it (Oliver 119). This is important when considering the role of language with concepts of the self and the body within trauma theory: "The model of the body – defined as the *chora* by Kristeva – could also be considered a model of the political where the modern differentiation of public and intimate have not yet been formed" (Sjoholm 5). The body becomes not just a representation of the individual and their experiences of trauma, but it stands as a metaphor for the body of the nation and the liminal, pre-linguistic spaces that could be available for expressions of identity beyond the public arena. In this way writing about trauma is a place for reading issues relating to gender and national identity.

Caruth may have developed trauma theory alongside gender and literary critical thought, but there is another strand of trauma theory which roots itself firmly in the historical field of study. A significant figure here is Dominick LaCapra who moulds, "psychoanalytical concepts to historical analysis as well as sociocultural and political critique in elucidating trauma and its after-effects in culture and in people" (LaCapra ix). This quotation not only highlights the significance of the historical unfolding of the notion of trauma within psychoanalytical studies for other fields of research, but it also engages with the need to connect with trauma in a new way when moving beyond its current field of thought. In doing so LaCapra insists on revisiting notions of representation by avoiding the "abstract explorations" of trauma, a term arguably referring directly to Caruth's theories (LaCapra x). LaCapra carefully describes the need not to generalise when it comes to issues of trauma and notes that although there is an acceptance of the concept of hyperbole in describing trauma, there must remain a disciplined historical approach that grounds the trauma in specifics of time and place. This echoes the need for contextualisation, but also places it above the literary engagement or search for symbolic interpretation:

Trauma registers in hyperbole in a manner that is avoided or repressed in a complacent reasonableness or bland objectivism, but hyperbole need not, and in my judgement should not, be the unmodulated response to all problems, especially when it takes the form of an all-or-nothing philosophy, typically linked to mimetic emulations of one or another variant of critical theory reduced to an all-purpose methodology or stylistic *passé-partout*. (LaCapra xii)

LaCapra does not negate the problematic of the narration and knowability of trauma, and acknowledges concerns when empathising with survivor testimony, but the conceptual issues must be placed at all times within the historical circumstances of the trauma. This is indeed a point that must be emphasised, particularly when considering political trauma, therefore where appropriate within a specific chapter, there may be explications of historical events to expand upon the references to these issues within the novel under discussion. One key point highlighted by LaCapra is the need for an engagement with the empathetic inscriptions which arise when considering trauma narratives.

Indeed, I insist on the need for empathetic unsettlement, and the discursive inscription of that unsettlement, in the response to traumatic events or conditions. Moreover, there is an important sense in which the aftereffects - the hauntingly possessive ghosts - of traumatic events are not fully owned by anyone and, in various ways, affect everyone. (LaCapra xi)

LaCapra acknowledges how the traumatic subject matter often leads to a need for unusual styles of writing such as the use of symbolic language, however this form of language, grounded as it is in empathetic interpretation, must also be considered for the complications which can arise from such empathetic stylistics. History and context remain in a symbiotic relationship with the engagement with trauma, thus highlighting their importance in the work of the authors within this study. LaCapra's theories therefore work alongside Caruth's writing to inform an understanding of trauma which will be explored within the following chapters.

Trauma and Memory

Trauma has an uneasy relationship with memory studies, which has long since acknowledged the political purposes of memory particularly with respect to social memory. In *Contested Pasts* Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone discuss the political implications of interpreting historical memory:

The very fact that there are divergences, inconsistencies, different versions at different times, is in itself revealing both about the culture in which these memories have been built and emerge, and about the workings of memory itself. The idea of memory as a tool with which to contest 'official' versions of the past, too, shifts from an opposition between the subordinate truth versus the dominant lie, to a concern with the ways in which particular versions of an event may be at various times and for various reasons promoted, reformulated, or silenced. (Hodgkin and Radstone 4-5)

Memory is relational in that the same act can be interpreted differently according to the person relating it, the time it is related, and the circumstances surrounding the relating of the past. The relationship between the memory and those who carry or narrate that memory is of utmost importance: not only can the memory shape the narration, but it is also shaped by it. Traumatic memory is a specific type of memory as it is formed in an attempt to generate signification for acts that are outside language and experience. Memory under these circumstances is fraught with problems of ordering and communicating, with the burden on those who experience the trauma and those who bear witness to the narrative, which can create legal and moral or political concerns. The re-telling of traumatic memories can be used to classify the act, the group or individuals concerned and may thus carry consequences. The ways in which traumatic memories are used has had profound consequences on how individuals have told their experiences of the Troubles. Memories are by definition contextualised ways of representing the past, which is reflected in how they are interpreted. They are described by Antze and Lambek in Freudian terms using the metaphor of the present as a screen, which acts as a distortion of the past:

The past does not correspond to the real in any direct, unmediated way since what we remember are memories – screens always already impressed by the fantasies or distortions of a series of successive rememberings. Hence memories, like dreams, are highly condensed symbols of hidden preoccupations. (Antze and Lambek vii)

The past is no longer accessible in unadulterated form; it can only be narrated through the present day interpretations of the individual or group's identity and purpose. This quotation also suggests *how* memories are narrated, through symbolic forms, thus the study of literature uncovers the ways in which the past has become symbolised and how these symbols have worked to interpret the past for our present understanding of history. This highlights the importance of choosing five different women writers, from a variety of backgrounds who were writing at different times during all four decades of the Troubles. In contrasting their works and exploring the unfolding symbolisation of the Troubles, it is possible to gain a fuller understanding of the textual representations of this period in Irish history, which may in turn enable us to gain new insights into the historical experience of trauma.

It is also important to consider the issue of gender when studying memory and trauma. Memory is gendered through experience and language: what is remembered and how it

is remembered is first of all registered within the body and subsequently processed using the gendered signification of language. Ronit Lentin highlights the link between the gendered and traumatised body and the act of signification in *Gender and Catastrophe* where she describes a “memory gap” between the body and the conscious mind. Lentin is thereby connecting the problematic narrative processing by women imprisoned within patriarchal discourse, with the gendering of the female body. This is an important theme in Anderson’s writing and she depicts her female protagonist in *Cuckoo* in a battle with patriarchal confines as she seeks a new way of asserting her female identity beyond traditional representations. Lentin employs the term “split memory” to describe the division between official discourses of events and those described unofficially by the women who experienced those events (Lentin 14). She suggests that public records go so far as to deliberately exclude private memories and thus the remembering of private history can be a political act of resistance toward official history (Lentin 14). In this way Lentin is highlighting the political role of gender in trauma and acts of remembering. Official histories and acts of memory tend to focus on power struggles and negate or ignore the counter-memories of women:

The intertwining of power and memory is very subtle, and it reflects both the particular areas of power which women and men hold in everyday life, and the various levels of public discourses. Memories supportive of the maintenance of existing power structures are usually assured wider social space and easier transmission. (Leydesdorff et al 8)

Producing collective memories of events is a public act that has socio-political consequences and that can be used to engage with power structures such as patriarchy. This highlights how important it is for women’s literature to be studied for its engagement with women’s experiences of trauma during times of political unrest. Leydesdorff et al (2005) in *Gender and Memory* point to the need to uncover archival sources to find the female voices behind the dominant patriarchal perspective too often found in the public political sphere. By engaging with the novels and short story collections by women from Northern Ireland it is possible to see women’s positions within the Troubles and how these authors seek to break through patriarchal constricts.

All the authors examined in this study have highlighted the role of the body as a site for trauma, while also attempting to find a symbolic expression of the trauma that would enable the reader to empathise with the experience, even if it remains beyond complete comprehension. Memory is seen as separate from the past, screened off in

memorialisation: in much the same way as a physical memorial can be erected as a symbol of the past, memory can exist as a 'site' or construct, which symbolises the past and separates it from the present even as it exists and is interpreted by the present. Traumatic memory is different to other types of memory in its inability to separate past from present. The living trauma emerges from the narrative in visceral form through destabilising the narrative's temporality. This is captured within the body, which displays the same physical responses to attempts to engage with past trauma as it would during the event itself. The body appears to be of paramount importance during trauma, not only because it is the initial site of the trauma but because there is a failure of language and signification to describe or process the trauma, the body registers the physical responses to the trauma and thus remains as a key site of memory for the trauma. The body registers through sensory perceptions and responds to the initial events, even as the mind fails to make sense of what it is experiencing. This is the gap, inexperience or unknowability that so many trauma theorists have registered as key to understanding trauma and post-trauma narratives. The need to understand and process the experience is part of the post-traumatic period. The body recreates the physical memories of the trauma in an attempt to bring knowledge of it to the conscious mind. Making sense of the unknown and inexplicable is a way of moving the experience beyond the body. One major trope used in trauma narratives is that of the death or burial of the body. Death and burial are thus fitting symbols for trauma, not only because the definition of trauma includes a fear that the individual will themselves die, or witness the violent death of another, but because the trauma itself can be experienced as a death of the pre-trauma self. The trauma has undermined the sense of self and the world to the extent that the system of interpretation is made redundant. The individual makes a clear distinction between the person they were before the trauma and the person they are post-trauma. In trauma literature this may mean a physical death, or can be symbolised in for example the splitting or doubling of self, the birth of a baby, and the fracturing of characters. These various tropes are explored in detail through the gendered bodies of the protagonists to help engage with the way in which trauma and memory may be linked to identity.

The body is often the first point of reference in expressing or reading identity markers. In addition, because gender is mediated through the language and socialisation of specific cultures, it is important to consider how women's bodies become sites for memorialising the past in trauma narratives. Embodiment can be considered as the place

where experiences and relativity are connected, as for example in the work of Rosi Braidotti (1994) which considers the body as a space where issues relating to the physical, the sociological, and the symbolic overlap. The process of experience teaches the body to behave according to particular responses. A text can operate as an engendering space that represents dominant patriarchal values; however feminist writers try to deconstruct traditional literary devices and discourse to suggest alternative ways of seeing. To conceive of the body as a political entity is to enable its expression of subjectivity, identity, culture, and so on. Deconstructing binarisms of gender, religion and politics refuses the suggestion that certain identity markers can be thought of in rigid ways that require certain bodily behaviours. Kristeva's (1982) work on abjection focused on the fascination with bodily products as a way of seeing the porous place between self and other. Linked to the abject body is the grotesque, which is a means of breaking social coding to allow for new ways of being. In this way the body can become a site of memory where the author can employ literary techniques to write the gendered experience of trauma beyond traditional codes and associations. Two of the authors in this study highlight the gendered body in trauma by emphasising the specificities of female parts of the body in trauma. Anderson depicts pregnancy, birthing, and menstruation to highlight the significance of the female form to the bodily experience of trauma. Burns turns the traumatised female body into a grotesque form of itself. The fluidity of meanings created within trauma narratives opens up a new understanding of the body, both as it exists within trauma and the post-trauma period.

The body is not the only physical space that can be seen to hold the memory of trauma. Just as the physical body can become a site of memory for the individual's trauma, so the physical landscape can be seen to hold sites of memory for collective trauma. Pierre Nora has linked the memory of trauma to the landscape, to physical spaces, particularly as they are understood in specific times and places. Place is important in Northern Ireland which is etched with sites of traumatic memory, either through formal memorials to the event or in the living memories of the nation. This is a point raised by Beckett who considers how the memories of the uprising remain part of the physical landscape in the dominating presence of Cavehill. It is also in Madden and Johnston's depictions of the Big House as sites for the colonial traumas of the Ascendancy. Mike Morrissey and Marie Smyth's 2002 study on the experiences of the Troubles highlights the importance of considering collective trauma as part of a study of the long-term effects of the Troubles. They note how the characteristics of certain events during the

Troubles appear to have traumatic impacts on individuals and communities who did not have direct experience of the event, as for example the 1987 Enniskillen bomb and Bloody Sunday in 1972:

These events become reference points for the history of the Troubles and as such are public pointers to certain political arguments or positions. They become, at one level, public property. Thousands of people ‘see’ the event or its aftermath on television and ‘know’ about it through print and broadcast media coverage. It becomes part of their history, and if the event is intense enough and in proximity to them it is incorporated into their experience of the Troubles. The event becomes known at the public level and incorporated into the individual and collective maps of the Troubles. (Morrissey and Smyth 137)

Sites of memory of specific events and specific places are therefore imprinted upon the collective national psyche and are passed down through the generations as a trauma that is part of the cultural identity. Pierre Nora argues in *Les Lieux de Memoire* that societies are changing and the past is now retained through mediated “sifted and sorted” history, rather than a social “real memory” that is “unself-conscious, commanding, all-powerful, spontaneous, actualising”; memory is separate from history as one is a living and growing entity and the other fixed in narrative form: “Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past” (Nora 8). Nora views memory as a living entity held within the physical bodies and minds of those who embody the past of their ancestors. Madden would appear to be presenting this concept in her *Birds of the Innocent Woods* where she explores the intricacies of memory through the image of a shell, spiralling throughout different generations as it moves through different chambers, which remain ultimately interconnected. In a similar fashion her characters are shown to be connected through the generations by the repetition of their trauma.

Nora defines sites of memory as spaces where socio-cultural memory “crystallizes and secretes itself” (Nora 7). Such sites of memory can be either physical places or objects such as museums, cemeteries, public memorials, symbols and emblems, or physical rituals, customs sayings or practices. These sites act to prevent the forgetting of what has been considered to be important. They are an active and embodied “will to remember”, which he defines as “any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature” that has become a symbol over time within “the memorial heritage of any community” (Nora 19). Both Johnston and Madden create sites of memory within the living bodies of their characters, but they also connect these traumas to the

national sites of memory embodied in the Anglo-Irish Big House. Nora links geography to the history of that area, therefore nation or state is understood in terms of the political events of the time and of the past, and national identity is understood according to the sanctioned history of a particular geographical area. Within a nation there may be vying interpretations of what it may mean to belong to that space. This is certainly true of the Big House estates, whose decline may hold nostalgia or oppression. Landscapes contain sites of memory which by their nature will influence an individual's understanding of the space. In Northern Ireland the same places can hold very different meanings and memories for those living there and this is particularly true of the areas where traumatic events have occurred, as for example on the streets of Belfast, or around the walls of Derry. Sites of trauma in Northern Ireland have become intense political spaces fought over for their associations and memories, which is perhaps best exemplified in the ongoing struggle over the suggestion that the Maze prison become a museum and the problems this would cause for setting out or referencing the physical spaces. It can thus be seen that these spaces can be used by the state to inscribe meaning both of the historical identity of the space and of the national identity.

Gerry Smyth in *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination* contends that, "modern Ireland is in fact obsessed with issues of space", whether this be geopolitical, or on an interim level, or at the interpersonal level (Smyth xv). Smyth notes how space has become an important part of cultural and postcolonial studies, and how the house or home is often used in literature as a metaphor embodying primal experiences associated with love, sanctuary, and images from early family memories. By re-engaging with the home as a site of trauma all five writers deconstruct these traditional notions of home. Beckett for example, considers the home as a place embodying the sense of loss, both of family and national identity. Smyth suggests that colonial and postcolonial spaces such as Ireland, are particularly important sites for looking at the politics of memory: "Space is not a 'text' but the site of fears and desires which are historically traceable, politically organised and socially effective" (Smyth 14). Ireland, impacted by the decolonising process, displays a concern with personal and communal identity which is expressed in its culture and literature. Novels set in and about specific spaces help to focus and set down identification markers for specific communities. Cities are planned space, and walking within them creates for the individual their own construction of that space, as was demonstrated by James Joyce, whose writing utilised this concept in his recreation of the past and the present Dublin life, thus showing how important space is for the

layering and interpreting of memory. Smyth notes how the gendering of the representations of public spaces have meant that women writers must either try to subvert these traditional tropes or politicise the neutral domestic space. The study of space can thus analyse power relations and domination both from a colonial and gendered position, and ought to take into account the cultural, economic and political aspects.

Trauma changes a sense of place so that it may become impossible to gain an understanding of a pre-trauma space once it has become changed by the traumas. In this way sites of trauma can be connected to a particular historical understanding of a specific place. This is a point that is shared by all the authors within this study, but is of particular relevance to Burns' *No Bones* where places such as the Ardoyne are understood through the character's memory of their connection to trauma. Hartman's work on memory and places for example, suggests that the Holocaust camps could be described as non-places, because of the nature of the space they occupied and the significance they had therefore acquired. Collective identities become more important during trauma, which may involve keeping the past alive by connecting places to significant times and events as for example, during the July marching season. In this way collective identities are formed around sites of memory. The memorialising of places of historic trauma such as the Battle of the Boyne, suggests a cultural identity based on the specific meaning of a specific space. Mike Morrissey and Marie Smyth (2002) describe Northern Ireland as existing in "two worlds", the dominant world that is visible as physical spaces and the "world composed of many individual private spaces", which are sites of memory for the traumas that happened in those spaces (Morrissey and Smyth 141). From their experiences during their collection of data about trauma, they became aware of the hidden memories attached to these sites, which for some exist as present day traumas:

In the cities, certain streets, that look just like every other street, are full of memories of death, pain and fear. We now know people who would find it hard to go down that street because a person they loved lay on the street in a pool of blood, or because they themselves were attacked in that place. (Morrissey and Smyth 141)

What the traumatised people are aware of is the reality of the horror that is present in the Troubles, which as Morrissey and Smyth suggest, is not an "option" when considering physical spaces, but part of what it constitutes. What they term "insider

knowledge” therefore leads to a different interpretation of deaths, as those who have suffered understand these deaths in a different way to those who merely hear the media statistics, which+ can lead to feelings of isolation from the wider community.

In Irish history it is not unusual to find specific traumatic events referred to by the *place* where they occurred, as for example with the Enniskillen bombing. They may also be defined by the particular *time* they happened as in Bloody Sunday, which is also referred to within nationalist communities as the Bogside Massacre. This could be an indication of the ongoing nature of the trauma, which remains within the place and time; within the physical or spatial site of memory. Time and place are therefore central issues raised in the narration of the Troubles and, as writers such as Madden suggest, the connection of memory to time and place is a complicated matter. Memory works in the formation of identity by piecing the fragments of remembered experiences together into some form of narrative that holds a central ‘I’ or ‘we’. However as Madden and Johnston highlight, the problematics of performing this piecing together of the traumatised self may result in further fragmentation of identity. There are of course concerns about the social and individual postmodern crisis of memory that has produced fractured narratives. Various theories have been put forward to suggest reasons for this, including postcolonial discussions, which explore the confusion that modern life has created for individual and group identification. In addition the genres used to express memory influence the ways an individual will form and narrate memories. The number of debates on memory are too numerous to mention here, suffice to note that memory, particularly traumatic memory is not a singular or straightforward term that can be defined without considering the nuances that surround such a term.

The Politics of Trauma

Jenny Edkins in *Trauma and the Politics of Memory* (2003) argues that trauma opens up a space or gap in the identity of nation, community or individual because it creates a break in their world view; communities in crisis question the voices of authority that make definitive statements concerning their identity and they question their relationships to other categorised groups. As a result Edkins suggests, in the period of time following a conflict, a rupture occurs in the dominant framing narratives:

Trauma time – the disruptive, back-to-front time that occurs when the smooth time of the imagined or symbolic story is interrupted by the real of ‘events’ – is

the time that must be forgotten if the sovereign power of the modern state is to remain unchallenged. And trauma time is exactly what survivors of trauma want to keep hold of, and to which it seems they want desperately to testify. Their testimony challenges sovereign power at its very roots. (Edkins 229-230)

Trauma is a space in the narrative that must be returned to and yet this is the very time which the state would wish to close down as it interrupts their power relations. The Troubles in Northern Ireland can be seen as just such a 'trauma time' when all traditional views of culture, state, identity, memory, history and so forth have been under revision. The Good Friday Agreement tentatively brought this period to an end and began a period of revision to seek to redefine the identity of Northern Ireland as a place which is separate from its previous Irish and British associations. The past however, lives in the spatial, geographical, and individual memory sites of those who have been part of the previous definitions and in the next generation who have had these sites passed down through conscious and unconscious means. Physical expressions, rural traditions, oral histories, folk songs, parades, wall murals, school histories, local housing, state buildings, barricades, and graveyards all embody sites for remembering the past. It is through these and the living memory and literature of the region that memory is held. Authors whose works run counter to the authoritative narrative of identity and history can produce texts that open rather than close meaning, with forms and styles rooted in fluidity.

Graham Dawson's 2007 work on trauma, *Making Peace with the Past? Memory, Trauma and the Irish Troubles* has led him toward the analysis of representations of the past as sites for memorialising the trauma. He was initially struck by the physical barriers created by the peace walls, which he describes as an iconic, visual symbol of this division, and the commemorative or political statements involved in the murals, but as his study progressed he began to understand the importance of particular moments of trauma and the memorialising of both time and place that was involved in these highly significant occasions. In a poignant scene in *One By One in the Darkness* Madden's character visualises a building with three walls covered with the names of the dead and the fourth as a window open to the sky: "a place which afforded dignity to memory, where you could bring your anger as well as your grief" (Madden 149). As Madden shows memorials are spaces that connect to the trauma through powerful emotions, signifying the past and the hope for the future. Dawson asks to what extent it is possible to realise a positive future whilst memorialising past conflicts, and refers to George

Mitchell's phrase "the decommissioning of the mind-sets" as a recognition of the difficulties involved in conflict resolution. Dawson recognised that the past can create scarring but suggests it can also be a motivating factor in seeking peaceful political justice and settlement (Dawson 4). In part one of *Making Peace* Dawson sets down his conceptual framework, including his overview of what he describes as the two "antagonistic" paradigms of the past, his interrogation of historical 'truths' and his work on collective memory (Dawson 47). Dawson acknowledges the importance of historical trauma within the peace process, but questions how there has been a manipulation of history so that trauma is considered as a past rather than current dilemma. He acknowledges that trauma is not past and explores instead how trauma is held in collective memories that remain very much a part of the current crisis. He states:

memory is not a single, internally unified process, but the site of often unconscious psychic conflicts involving defensive versus reparative modes of remembrance. Attention to these psychic dimensions of memory enables an understanding of subjective attachments to 'the past' as these play out within the process of conflict resolution. [...] This process poses obstacles to reparative remembering, which involves an opening of the psyche to those internal emotional realities which have been split-off and contained, perhaps disavowed and denied, thereby allowing 'something new to happen' within the internal world. (Dawson 311)

Dawson therefore sees memory as wrought from the confliction of memory based in these sites of trauma. Attempts to memorialise the past exposes the splitting of memory, particularly on the collective level where it becomes impossible to produce a coherent narrative of the traumatic past. He considers the current attempts at collective commemorative process as significant in understanding how the decades of the Troubles are presently being acknowledged. He also suggests that the collective psyche has a definitive influence on the individual's grieving process, which is an idea that is explored in the work of all five authors. What is found in their works concurs with his notion that the reoccurrences of past traumas are found in the present on a collective level. He suggests that by acknowledging trauma through new realities, such as those that can be found in literature, it may be possible to work through the collective trauma to find new ways of remembering the past.

What is perhaps most interesting in Dawson's work is how, like Edkins, he considers the space created by trauma as an important opportunity for redefinition. He notes how both communities have a similar way of processing trauma and memory that, despite its

varied use of the past and key focuses, remains ‘polylogic’; it focuses both against the other community and against a state representative to visualise the past as a shared, ‘our’ experience. All of these he suggests are directed at the definition of the State of Northern Ireland. It is, according to Dawson, this very clash between the sites of trauma that opens up possibilities:

Close examination of the Troubles in particular areas promotes an awareness of how members of the local communities have come to be positioned in relation to one another within the nexus of past, present and place, as well as how they live out the legacy of the past in their different ways. These places of trauma, where contested memories continue to clash within the conflict-resolution process, are also the places where the work of peace-building and reparation is most urgently required and, often, most vigorously pursued. (Dawson 28)

Dawson appears to be building on the work of Pierre Nora to show how borderland spaces, the places most contested and constantly under review, are the very areas most productive as part of a movement toward new definitions not only of the specific site of memory, but of a national identity that may allow cohesion in its collective memory. It is not surprising therefore that writers from Northern Ireland tend to focus on the same events and places, such as found in both Beckett’s and Burns’ depiction of the same small maze of Belfast streets. In the second section of his study Dawson explores the contested early trauma of Bloody Sunday. Dawson suggests that the personal memories of the people he interviewed had become woven through with the public images of the event and the collective, “unified counter-memory of injustice and the violation of human rights” (Dawson 177). It is therefore important to read how these events are represented in trauma literature and to particularly engage with writers who may eschew traditional tropes. Dawson considers that certain traumas hold special significance for certain communities: he sees Bloody Sunday as iconic for republicans, and sets it against a variety of key events, in particular the Enniskillen bomb, which have cumulatively enhanced the siege mentality of the Protestants living in the borderlands between north and south. Dawson notes how Enniskillen became an important commemorative site through its public memorial and how this became a contested site as it merged with the events of the day itself, which was significant as it was the Poppy Day memorial for the war dead. He also suggests that there has been a cross-generational collective memory of these events, which has been both positive, in that it connects group cohesion, and negative in its transference of trauma:

For the new generation [...] local collective memory of the event and its aftermath is actively taken on and made their own, in a cross-generational exchange mediated through stories, images and participation in commemorative rituals, both public and private. Unlike the case of the Holocaust families in Hirsch's work, however, the collective 'postmemory' of Bloody Sunday appears to be experienced by significant numbers of the successor generations less as a burden than as a positive identification with the living, current struggle for peace, truth and justice. (Dawson 197)

Dawson uses the example of the poem (also quoted in Patrick Hayes and Jim Campbell's 2005 study on Bloody Sunday), which was read out at the twenty-five year anniversary of Bloody Sunday by young people who 'remember' events that happened four years before they were born. In many respects Dawson's concept that this is positive, would need to be examined in light of how these traumas have become enmeshed in the political movement and the degree that they remained ongoing due to the lack of recognition afforded by failed enquiries. Anna Burns' engagement with this event, read alongside Edkins' work on state trauma, will in chapter five enable a further engagement with this important event and its consequences.

The ways in which personal trauma can become codified and used during political power battles is addressed by Kali Tal in *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*. She notes the importance of separating traumatic experiences by making distinctions between the experiences of the various groups: "Within a society, there may be several targeted groups, whose members are subject to traumatization in greater or lesser degrees" (Tal 9). Part of this grouping means that some members will be victimised, whether or not they consciously identify with the group, and others will escape trauma. Tal defines trauma by highlighting its liminality in relation to socio-political language and by suggesting that it can only be understood through a process of signs or images that allow for definition beyond normal language:

Trauma is enacted in a liminal state, outside of the bounds of 'normal' human experience, and the subject is radically ungrounded. Accurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without recreating the event since, by its very definition, trauma lies beyond the bounds of 'normal' conceptions. Textual representations – literary, visual, oral – are mediated by language and do not have the impact of the traumatic experience. (Tal 15)

Tal suggests that there is a problem of difference in the understanding of the traumatised person who has attached new meanings to the signs, and the witness who may not be able to interpret these new meanings: "survivors still use the word *terror*, non-

traumatised audiences read and understand the word *terror*, and the dislocation of meaning is invisible” (Tal 16). These signs may be “read” by persons who have experienced other forms of trauma, but the full meaning of the words cannot be known except to the specific survivor. Therefore Tal suggests that literature of trauma may seek to engage with the traumatic experience only through an ongoing dialogue with its own means of representation. This would suggest that the more openly a narrative highlights its use of the symbolic, the more successful it may be at opening up an understanding of the trauma. Tal goes on to point out the direct relationship between the representation of trauma and the political situation surrounding the trauma, and points to the politics of reading:

The critics of literature of trauma may extract the moral that two people can represent the same experience, using similar imagery and descriptive terminology and create literary works with entirely different meanings – meanings which are not located in the words themselves but in the interaction between writer and text, between reader and text, between reader and writer. (Tal 18)

Alongside the urge to bear witness and to hear the story of trauma, there exists a clear interaction that highlights the problems of this relationship of reader and writer with the narrative text. As Tal later states: “When trauma is written as text, it transcends the bounds of the personal. It becomes metaphor; yet, when such texts are read, they are once again personalised, assimilated somehow by the reader” (Tal 132). The focus necessitates a move toward the inability of language to adequately convey the emotional impact of the trauma: non-survivors cannot re-experience the trauma and it appears impossible for them to grasp the myth-exploding experience. Therefore the use of trauma narratives within the public readings of the events must acknowledge an engagement with the issues of reading and interpretation and how it may become politically encoded.

In conclusion, there are often vying areas of concern within the developing field of trauma studies. Many of the original definitions and ideas associated with trauma remain in trauma theory today. Perhaps the most prominent of these is the problem of constructing semantic and interpretative frameworks for understanding trauma, both as it is experienced and as it is borne witness to. The lack of signification for an experience so intensely beyond the normal spectrum creates problems when narrating trauma. Trauma can be seen to remain for some time as a physical experience held within the

sensory memory and therefore narratives often reference the body as a way of accessing the trauma. The functions of the body in whole or in part frequently appear as tropes for the trauma. When the trauma has been experienced on a collective level, the body may also be used as a site for understanding collective responses, with maiming and illness as metaphors for the malady of PTSD. Alternatively the body may be replaced by encodings found in the physical landscape, which carries the memories of the collective psyche in much the same fashion as the physical body does for the individual. However, memory is no longer seen as singular when it moves into the national collective sphere and therefore sites of memory become contested spaces, which may lead to the return of repressed traumas. Several patterns can be seen to emerge in the narration of trauma, which suggest that the trauma is experienced as a death and therefore the event may be described in terms relating to death or burial, or as the haunting of the individual in the post-trauma period. Trauma experienced in the Troubles is both an individual and a collective experience as it is part of the struggle over memory and identity, both for the self and for the nation. It is important to find ways of interpreting, understanding and narrating trauma as part of the post-trauma construction of individual and social identity. The literature written from and about periods of trauma, seeks to engage with these issues and as such creates a textual space wherein trauma can be studied. All of the above will be expanded upon during the in-depth readings of trauma literature in the following chapters.

Chapter Two: Mary Beckett and the Trauma of War from the 1940s to the 1970s

Mary Beckett: An Introduction to the Author

Mary Beckett was born on 28th January 1926 into a middle-class Catholic family living in an affluent Protestant area of Belfast, in contrast to the working class nationalist areas she depicts in much of her writing. She has given several interesting interviews which illuminate her background and its influence on her writing as, for example, with Donna Perry in 1993 and Megan Sullivan in 2000. Beckett comments that her surname, which was inherited from her Protestant grandfather, and her childhood experiences, allow her to have what she refers to as “radical ambiguity” in her socio-political understandings (Perry 63). Her education was in Catholic schools such as St. Columban’s National School and St. Dominic’s High School. She followed her father into the teaching profession by studying at St Mary’s Teacher Training College before working for eleven years as a primary teacher at the Holy Cross Primary in the Ardoyne area of Belfast. It was during this period of her life that Beckett was inspired to write stories which reflected not only her own life experiences but those of the families she met through her teaching career. Her first story “The Excursion”, which describes gender inequalities from a married woman’s perspective, was broadcast on BBC Radio Northern Ireland in 1949 after winning a BBC contest to find a new voice in Irish writing. The mid-1950s signalled change for Beckett, which began with her marriage to Peter Gaffey in 1956 and a move to Dublin, where she began family life, raising five children and coping with the still-birth of her first child. It was during these years that Beckett took a break in her writing career. She has noted that women of her generation in Ireland often found it difficult to gain the support they needed both within the home and the publishing world to continue with their writing. She states: “women wrote, then faded out” (Beckett: Gonzalez 15). Beckett however was to come back to writing later in life to produce her most esteemed work.

Beckett gained entry into publication through the encouragement of Peadar O’Donnell who took over the editorship in 1946 of the ground-breaking journal *The Bell*. Published monthly from 1940-1954 *The Bell* is often described as the most influential literary

magazine of the mid-twentieth century as it represents the changing face of modern Ireland in defiance of De Valera's dream of a rural Irish idyll.¹² *The Bell* encouraged emerging voices alongside established authors from all areas of Ireland to explore and experiment within their writing and it became a much needed place for new writers, including writers from the north, who were "unselfconsciously assumed to be part of *The Bell's* country" (McMahon 10). Sean O'Faolain laid down his inclusive ideas for *The Bell* in his introduction to the first magazine where he noted that the name was chosen for its lack of association and openness to all (McMahon 16). Beckett published six stories in *The Bell* between 1951-54. Her first story "A Farm of Land" was published in the July 1951 edition, "The Young Writer" in October 1951, "Pilgrimage" in January 1952, "Saints and Scholars" in March 1953, "Millstones" in February 1954 and "The Balancing of the Clouds" in November 1954. These stories cover many different themes from rural traditions to working in the Belfast mills, but they hold as central an understanding of women's lives in Northern Ireland and thus represent an important perspective both within the magazine itself and the wider literary field.

Beckett struggled to find places to have her work published when the creative journals to which she was contributing ceased their circulation, but she had an important advocate of her work in the writer and editor David Marcus, who worked tirelessly to encourage new writers both with his inclusion of their work in his numerous anthologies and with his *New Irish Writing* publications in *The Irish Press*.¹³ Marcus published several of Beckett's short stories in his collections including "Three Dreams Cross" in his *Irish Writing: Women Writers Issue*, which was the first journal in Ireland to contain only women's writing and, more recently, in his 1999 *Irish Ghost Stories* which showed Beckett's diversity of style in "A Ghost Story". Marcus can also be credited with enabling Beckett back into publication after almost two decades of silence when in the 1970s he helped her to publish her short story "A Belfast Woman" in *The Irish Times* literary section and then to gather her stories together into a collection which was published by Poolbeg in 1980 under the title *A Belfast Woman*.¹⁴ The response to this collection is summed up by Damian Smith, from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland:

¹² An example of this concept can be seen in Kelly Matthews "The Bell Magazine: A Dissenting Vision of Irish Identity." Brisset and Doody, 2012.

¹³ The New Irish Writing Page is the longest running creative writing feature in any Irish or British journal or newspaper. Marcus founded it in 1969 and it continues to this day. It has introduced many writers who have gone on to become major literary voices.

¹⁴ Marcus started Poolbeg Press along with Philip Dermott as a way of helping emerging writers into publication.

I go back to the 1980s when *A Belfast Woman* came out. It was the first time I ever saw the word Belfast on the front of a book, a collection of short stories. It was a very stark title. [...] Coming from a culture of a lot of male writers, this was a new voice from an unexpected place. Her work was very distinctive and her themes were very different; she was writing about ordinary people, about women. (*Belfast Telegraph* 12 Nov. 2013)

The impact of this book therefore cannot be under-estimated as is confirmed by its continued inclusion in contemporary anthologies of Irish writers.

Following the success of her short story collection, Beckett was encouraged to write her first novel *Give Them Stones* (1987), which produced interesting comparisons and contrasts with “A Belfast Women”. This publication created renewed interest in her writing within literary circles and her books were positively reviewed in Ireland, Britain and America. In 1987 she received a *Sunday Tribune* Arts Award and in 1988 she was shortlisted for the Hughes Fiction Award. Unfortunately, despite these recognitions of the quality of her writing, there has been a tendency amongst the critics to label Beckett as a realist writer and to dismiss or sideline her work as a study of women’s “private” worlds, thus diminishing her importance within the Irish and particularly Northern Irish canon of writers. This is typified by Elmer Kennedy-Andrews who defines Mary Beckett’s writing as “Socialist feminism” which he sees as useful for “exploring women’s oppressed position in the realms of politics, family and work” (Kennedy-Andrews 34). This suggests Beckett presents a very negative view of women as victims, whereas Beckett has highlighted the strength of the women in her novels and there is a complexity within the gender divide that she depicts. Kennedy-Andrews misunderstands the character of Martha in *Give Them Stones* by defining her as “emotionally repressed, deadly humourless and utterly charmless”, with what he terms her “priggish rectitude and puritan rigidity” (Kennedy-Andrews 246). However he fails to contextualise the relationship between Martha and her husband, or to consider the influence of the war and the difficulties that prevented Martha from forming close bonds to those she loved. Beckett works within the margins of the story to show the constraints upon her protagonists and a closer reading of her novel suggests that it is within the gaps of the narrative where the fuller story is found.

Eve Patten’s “Women and Fiction: 1985-1990” (1990) also labels Beckett’s writing as a realist “documenting of recent history” (Patten 3). Patten argues that her “style is never

more than one step away from *reportage*” making it a “sociological tract” lacking in “imaginative distortion” (Patten 2, 3). Similarly in “Fiction and Conflict” (1995) Patten uses the terms “pseudo-autobiographical” and “rites of passage” (Patten 131). Some contemporary critics have also fallen into the trap of overlooking the depth and importance of Beckett’s work. An example of this is Michael Meyer’s “Feminist Voices: Women’s Short Fiction after 1945” (2008), which dismisses Beckett’s work as “Irish realism” which focuses on the “private lives” of the female characters, and he uses words like “bemoan” to describe how they portray their “sad” lives (Meyer 342). This is a terrible injustice within a chapter that is suggesting support for women writers and sadly echoes a much outdated traditional critical position. She may not have the tools of the postmodern writer, but Beckett’s imaginative use of imagery, her doubling of characters and emotive depictions of place, work along with her fluid use of time and metaphor to create writing that is far beyond the realist labelling placed upon her work. Anne Owen Weekes (1995) provides a more open reading of Beckett as she praises her varied representation and suggests how she works on a metaphorical level to expose the hidden emotions of her characters:

“A Belfast Woman” and Beckett’s novel *Give Them Stones* (1987) both show an irruption of hidden cancers in the overt troubles of the 1970s and 1980s. The women and men they present are basically decent people who attempt to lead lives isolated from the disease around them. (Weekes 89)

Weekes is highlighting how Beckett considers men’s positions as well as women’s and uses the example of Beckett’s story “The Master and the Bombs” for its explorations of male bravado. Gerry Smyth (1997) performs an interesting Marxist-feminist reading of *Give Them Stones* and Megan Sullivan explores Beckett’s representation of Nationalist ideologies in her essay in *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identity* (2000). Although the majority of the critical analysis of Beckett’s writing has focused on her story “A Belfast Woman” and her first novel *Give Them Stones*, contemporary critics are beginning to expand in their approaches to Beckett’s work, as for example Jeanette Shumaker’s psychoanalytical-feminist reading of Beckett’s short story “Ruth”.¹⁵

Beckett has also written *A Literary Woman* (1990) which is a collection of ten short stories connected through characters, plot devices and themes. *The Irish Times*

¹⁵ Shumaker, Jeanette. “Irish ‘Fallen’ Women in Stories by Mary Beckett, Lilian Roberts Finlay and Emma Cooke.” *Short Story*. 7. 2. (Fall, 1999): 91-98.

considers this book as her greatest work and suggests it echoes the writing of Henry James (23 Nov. 2013). She also has stories published in other collections such as “Heaven”, which has been included in Ailbhe Smyth’s *Wildish Things*.¹⁶ In 1989 Beckett changed the direction of her writing and published the children’s book *Orla Was Six*, (which was re-printed in 1992) and its sequel *Orla at School* (1991). Beckett continued writing for children with her *A Family Tree* (1992) and *Hannah or Pink Balloon* (1995). These books have yet to be credited with critical analysis and are rarely mentioned in her canon of works. It is hoped that Beckett’s writing, as it stands in whole or in part, will come back into print for a new generation of critics that will look afresh at the importance of her writing. When Beckett sadly passed away in November 2013 she was highly praised in her Obituaries as, “an award winning author” and a leading Irish writer who has helped to put Northern Ireland on the literary map (Ferguson *The Belfast Telegraph* 12 Nov 2013). *The Irish Times* quoted Miranda Seymour’s appreciation of Beckett’s use of artistic tools to juxtapose images and to deliver unexpected twists.¹⁷ Beckett’s writing, as will be shown in this thesis, contains a wealth of readings and is more skilled than many of the critical readings of her works would imply. She places the trauma of war at the centre of her novel and moves through time to show how the events that open the novel are directly related to the events that preceded it, therefore allowing the reader to see how the past remains as a driving force within the present day.

Introduction to the Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to focus on the transposition of the traumas of war into narrative form, and the specific ways that gendered differences are described and inscribed into these narratives. An examination of writing about the Troubles would be incomplete if it did not take into account the major influences that were present in the preceding period, which moulded and shaped how the Troubles came to be perceived and represented. Mary Beckett is a well-known writer who focuses on war as a central theme for much of her work, alongside her depiction of women and men struggling to come to terms with the major changes in Ireland throughout the mid-twentieth century. Her work offers insights into how women were moulded into specific gender roles and,

¹⁶ This story is also included in Evelyn Conlon and Hans Christian Oeser’s *Cutting the Night in Two: Short Stories by Irish Women Writers* (2001).

¹⁷ “Belfast Miniaturist Influenced by Henry James.” Obituary. *The Irish Times*. 23 Nov 2013. rpt. <<http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/belfast-miniaturist-influenced-by-henry-james-1.1604388>>

in the case of many of her main characters, how they fought against stereotyping. Her short story “A Belfast Woman” can be read as an engagement with the Freudian concept of the return of the repressed, as her protagonist Mary relives the trauma of losing her childhood home in the years leading up to the Troubles. Beckett’s novel *Give Them Stones* (1987) sharpens her focus on the subject of trauma and war as it discusses how the Second World War changes her young protagonist Martha and her family, whilst drawing alongside this a picture of the Troubles in working class Belfast. *Give Them Stones* concentrates on the after-effects of World War II particularly on the women of Belfast who, as non-combatants, experience the traumas of war in the gaps of knowing and in the harsh realities of post-war recovery. Beckett raises several important issues about women’s roles in times of war in general, and how certain events from Irish history such as Partition, Internment, and Post-World War Two traumas, may be conceived of as a repetition of repressed traumas when they re-occur during the Troubles. The questioning of history and identity, alongside socio-political issues, is central to her writing, which suggests that the Troubles did not just begin with Bloody Sunday, or the political demonstrations of the Civil Rights Marches, but began much earlier within the communities, families, and individual’s minds.

Beckett’s writing captures the cultural and political changes that were happening in Belfast during the Second World War by looking specifically at women and illuminates how the post-war decades are important for understanding the events leading up to the culmination of violence during the Civil Rights demonstrations and the subsequent Northern Irish Troubles. Bardon in *A History of Ulster* refers to this period as “The Quiet Years”, which is a misnomer considering it covers the period between the changing of the Irish Free State into the Republic of Ireland in 1949 and the onset of the Troubles, and was therefore a time of flux for identity, politics and culture, on both sides of the border (Bardon 587). It is also a time of major social change, particularly for women’s lives in Ireland, which had been dominated by moral and religious attitudes that gave women sparse choices and few political powers. Beckett demonstrates how during the 1950s, the divisions of public and private are complicated in a society where the female is often the main wage earner and child-carer. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews argues that female writers “enforce” the separation of public and private by creating the sectarian male as threatening the “superior ‘feminine’ world of personal feeling and relationship” (Kennedy-Andrews 225). This is however an essentialist argument that in itself separates the male warrior from the emotional female

other and Beckett's novel complicates this perception. I would argue that in Northern Ireland there is no such separation possible, as the political world enters into the domestic, literally and figuratively. Beckett's fiction depicts a world in which the war zone is indiscriminate and pervasive: the fighting and protests are on the streets, the boys are knee-capped against the gable walls, the houses are burnt out and the children attacked. The women become warriors, defying the curfew, banging bin lids in protest in the streets, being stopped by the army, using their voices and their bodies as weapons.

Beckett shows how certain traumatic events remain in the collective memory, so that the trauma from past generations resonated throughout subsequent generations for her protagonists and their families. She considers how the division of the country brought about divisions in the community and discrimination against Catholics, leading to unemployment, poor housing, ill-health, bad education and extreme poverty. Two traumatic events affecting the Catholic communities in Belfast during the early years of the Troubles remain as repressed traumas in the collective psyche. These major events are the burning of nationalist homes and the introduction of Internment. The Troubles is considered by many as beginning on the night of 14th August 1969 when Protestant militants invaded the Ardoyne and lower Falls forcing over 3,500 Catholics from their homes, injuring over 450 people and killing six people (Maguire 182). The burning of homes is a trauma that is re-visited from previous generations, where similar violence culminated in setting fire to whole streets of houses during the years surrounding Partition. The loss of family and the destruction or loss of the home in Beckett's writing suggests the ending of the familiar, the death of the pre-traumatised self, and the need to build a new identity beyond the destruction. The repetition of this loss is echoed in the repetition of loss and the grief over the missing men in the family. The introduction of Internment in August 1971 not only saw the removal of men from their communities but again resulted in the migration of over 2,000 people from their homes. This was not the first time that Internment had been faced by the Catholic communities as it had also been experienced during the Second World War as a defence against nationalist politics, which saw the removal of boys and men for the duration of the war. The reintroduction of Internment and the constant fear of burning out are therefore the return of past traumas during the Troubles. The statistics behind the time-period that Beckett is describing become meaningful as she represents the trauma of these communities as a living memory re-enacted upon and within the people and the places they inhabit.

Beckett depicts the Partitioning of the six counties of Northern Ireland as a scar upon the identity and psyche of the people. This scarring is central to Beckett's portrayal of Mary Harrison's family in "A Belfast Woman" where the impact of the traumas of the multiple burning out from the past, reappears in future generations as echoes of the early days of the Partition. Beckett draws a similar connection between past and current traumas in her novel *Give Them Stones* where she explores the role played by Internment in traumatising Martha's family during the Second World War. The fears and poverty that occurred during these years were fresh in the minds of the Catholic community when they were faced once again with Internment during the early days of the Troubles. This event is a repetition in its disempowerment and criminalisation of a large section of the Catholic community. The British government, concerned about the neutrality of the Republic of Ireland during the war, instigated an emergency act that allowed police to remove anyone suspected of connections, however tenuous, with IRA or nationalist politics. The prisoners were held without trial for the duration of the war and on release were unable to find work because of their criminal records. Several of the themes and experiences of trauma from "A Belfast Woman" are repeated in Beckett's novel *Give Them Stones*. Beckett claims she was encouraged to write *Give Them Stones* as an extended version of "A Belfast Woman" because she wanted to explain the realities of Belfast life for modern women (Perry 70). This would suggest that Beckett has created a dialogue between the two narratives, which begins with the biblical associations of the names of her protagonists, Mary and Martha. Both of these characters show a strength of will during suffering, but even as they converge on their backgrounds and political view, the traumas they experience and how they respond are very different. Beckett's writing therefore can be considered as an expression of the return of repressed historical traumas and she explores how these impact upon the lives of the powerful women she creates.

Beckett and the Short Story

The eleven stories Beckett collected together in *A Belfast Woman* can be divided between her exploration of the choices and problems faced by women, and her focus on the impact of war. As noted four of these stories were first printed during the 1950s in *The Bell* while other stories appeared in *Thresholds*, *Irish Writing* journals, and various anthologies and many were also recreated for BBC and RTE radio broadcasts. The

immediacy of her worlds captures emotional realities with metaphors and images that break through the grim war and post-war settings. Megan Sullivan notes that Beckett's stories address: "women's relationship to substantive forces in Northern Ireland: Republicanism, nationalism, socialism, the women's movements, literary and publishing traditions, unemployment, Internment and education" (Sullivan 10). Beckett's stories and her first novel are set either within Belfast or the neighbouring rural areas and are thus an invaluable archive of a particular period in Northern Ireland as no other writer has captured the mixture of urban and rural characters at this significant time.¹⁸ As McMahon acknowledges: "She writes accurately and darkly but with great compassion about the poorer people of her native city, and of the politically speckled country-side where the grandparents of her city characters once lived in uneasy truce with the opposite sect" (McMahon, *Bell* 185). Beckett explores the clash between the emerging modern world and the old traditions, the inequality in marital relationships, employment and unemployment issues, illegitimacy, post-war poverty and traumas, the changing face of the rural and urban landscapes on the various communities, the changing position of women in society particularly in response to the educational reforms, the continuing effects of historical inequality on Catholic farmers, the developing religious and political divides, the effects of Catholic morality on women and children, emigration, and gendered responses to war situations. In many cases there is a question mark as to whether the women are more empowered by change or if their roles are indeed just as constrained in different ways.

Beckett does not engage overtly with trauma in the majority of her stories, but echoes remain throughout her exploration of a nation in crisis. The clash between traditional society and post-war modernity resonates with an undercurrent of the memories of war. She creates a sense of melancholy concerning the harshness of the traditional ways and the gap it creates between the generations and implies that the old ways are no longer applicable to the post war lives as illustrated when young women are prepared to become independent of their families despite the constraints in seeking such independence. Traditions such as inheritance and arranged marriages are explored for example in "A Farm of Land" when Susan Lavery refuses her father's plans to join together two adjacent farms by marrying her to the neighbouring farmer. When she returns home to sell the farm after her parent's death, the community are disgusted and

¹⁸ Beckett continues to focus on women in her second novel *A Literary Woman* (1990) which, however moves away from war in the north and into Dublin and therefore will not be considered in this study.

“horrified” that she had “rejected her inheritance” and “lamented the way young people nowadays had no respect for the dead” (Beckett 32). This shows the strength of community pressure to conform to traditional ways. Stories such as “The Excursion”, “The Pursuit of Happiness”, “A Farm of Land”, “The Balancing of the Clouds”, “Ruth”, and “Saints and Scholars” examine social pressures and the dominating power of the Catholic Church. The women in these stories are faced with few choices over their lives, which are controlled by social and political laws that see women’s chief purpose in life as serving the men (which can mean husbands, fathers, brothers, or sons) and bearing children. The women who remain childless are seen as failures, “wasted” and “past all use as women” (Beckett 48). This in itself often leads to impossible situations as the women find themselves trapped, making difficult choices and dealing in isolation with grief and loss. Despite these problems, Beckett shows a strength and determination that enables the women to find ways beyond their confines. In the background to these social issues is the political unrest that would lead to social unrest and ultimately to the Troubles, which in itself creates problems within gender and national identity as will be demonstrated in the analysis of these stories.

Beckett repeats several themes throughout this collection such as imprisonment, isolation, hardship, grief, lack of choices, and moral dilemmas, which look back at the influences from the recent past and to some extent predict the violence that is to come. The Civil War and the Second World War reverberate as underlying influences on the protagonists and their communities and Beckett explores how the traumas of the past can resurface in the present. Although it is not until her story “A Belfast Woman” that Beckett engages with the Troubles, the socio-political divisions that are at the foundations of the Troubles can be seen to be brooding in the violence and unease of the earlier stories. For example Beckett’s short story “Millstones”,¹⁹ which explores the few avenues of work that were open to women during the late industrial era, anticipates a theme re-visited in Beckett’s novel, where a future generation of women are the only wage-earners when the husbands are interned during the Second World War and the Troubles. The narrative stance manages to capture the tone and attitude of the small community of women who supported or rejected one another according to a narrow set of mores and religious codes. Without financial help Nelly becomes homeless when her husband goes to prison leaving her alone with four small children. It culminates in a local man attacking her at the mill where she goes for work: “The woman said it was

¹⁹ First published in *The Bell*. 19. 3. Feb. (1954): 48-52.

terrible to watch him the way he persecuted her. But there was nobody there when he pushed her over the loom” (Beckett: McMahon 184). This story like many of Beckett’s stories shows how destructive it can be when women become trapped within the web of codes that govern the few opportunities available for work.

In “Flags and Emblems” Beckett returns to the juxtaposition of the idyllic landscape of Ireland with the iconography of war. The title of this short story recalls the 1954 Flags and Emblems Act that was passed in Northern Ireland to prohibit the flying of the Irish tricolour on Northern Irish soil and to make it a criminal offence to disturb or destroy the Union Jack. By highlighting this Act, Beckett is acknowledging the official political lines that are drawn between the two communities and how such laws merely serve to reinforce rather than help the divisions.²⁰ The story is set during the English Royal family’s post-war visit to Northern Ireland.²¹ Beckett opens the story with the romanticised rural idyll of a young girl lying in “a hollow in the sand dune”, her ears filled with the sound of the sea and her cheeks warm from the sun (Beckett 69). This perfect symbiotic relationship with nature is shattered by the sound of gunfire in the distance. The effect of such violence is described as rippling out from the source as we are made aware that there will be serious consequences:

On the edge, remnant of the backwash of a boat, a bubble of froth formed and drifted uncertainly out towards the current for the sea. Another followed, and another, each single, untouched, bumped now and then by a ripple, a feeble unending procession. (Beckett 69)

This turbulent water predicts the impact of the following events, each separate but part of the progression toward the start of the Troubles. The “unending procession” is both the actual march within the story, and the slow march of events towards Bloody Sunday. The emerging girl, emblematic of the traditional image of Ireland, moves into the modern urban landscape filled with flags, bunting and the sound of deafening drums, which indicates the separation of nationalist and unionist politics. As an Irish Catholic she has been left out of the celebrations for a British monarchy. Her father’s shop is shuttered and barred as an example of the defensive nature required of a Catholic family living in a predominantly Protestant area. The main action of the story

²⁰ The divisions that this Act caused are still seen today in the current protests against removing the Union Jack flag from Belfast City Hall. The unionist sections of the community view this as undermining their political stance and several violent reactions have been caused by this decision, thus demonstrating the importance placed on flags and emblems within a divided country.

²¹ Beckett is not explicit about the circumstances of the visit as Elizabeth visited Northern Ireland three times between 1945 and 1949, but it is possible this may be the 1953 Coronation visit.

revolves around the tension caused between the young girl's father and his son Fergus after a clash over a British Union Jack flag that the wife (from a Protestant Unionist background) picked from the floor on the spur of the moment to give to their son. This action means that Fergus and his father will be outcast from Nationalist groups. Beckett understands the difficult mesh of social taboos that worsen a sensitive political move such as a royal visit, but she is suggesting that it is not the public display that is important; it is the need to move away from traditional attitudes towards understanding and acceptance.

Several of Beckett's stories consider the hidden traumas of a divided Ireland during the Second World War and the continuing impact on the borderlands between North and South. The separation of the British controlled North from the neutrality of the Irish Free State was a major problem during World War Two, which increased the tensions between the nationalist and unionist communities. In "Theresa" Beckett considers the complicated emotional and social stigma attached to illegitimacy as a trope for the post-war period. Theresa, who becomes pregnant by an American soldier, hides her baby in a Catholic orphanage, until she is encouraged by a local priest to bring her baby, Deirdre, back home. This encouragement to bring the results of war into the public domain can be read as trying to understand and accept the traumas of war. Beckett's depiction of Theresa can be read using traditional Irish tropes, as symbolic of the Mother Ireland and Deirdre's birth representative of the stigma of Ireland's post-war position in relation to the rest of Europe. Both Theresa's mother and Harry, the man she later marries, refer to the war, how it has brought major changes in the community, and its ongoing influence. Harry says of Deirdre: "Didn't I think all the fun had ended with the war. But we'll get a lot of crack out of this yet" (Beckett 18). This is an ironic suggestion as the social stigma and responsibility of raising Deirdre depresses Theresa who changes from the carefree young girl at the start of the war into an exhausted, unhappy and "haggard" woman, thus embodying the physical and emotional impact of war (Beckett 22). Beckett's choice to depict the baby as a black girl suggests a reference to Ireland and the black Deirdre of Irish myth to which the protagonist refers (Beckett 14).²² By referencing Deirdre of the Sorrow whose birth lead to the death and suffering of many, Beckett indicates the consequences of war and the emerging divisions in Ireland.

²² *Deirdre of the Sorrows* is a play by J M Synge (1910) which was based in the Ulster Cycle. Deirdre fulfilled the prophesy of her birth when she fell in love with Naisi and refused to marry Conchubar, the King of Ulster, to whom she had been betrothed from childhood. When Conchubar murders Naisi, Deirdre kills herself and her father joins Queen Maeve in the war against Ulster.

“The Master and the Bombs” echoes several of the themes set out in “Theresa” as it also considers the continuing impact of the Second World War and how the traumas return to foreshadow issues that will arise for women during the Troubles. This story explores how the war for Independence remained alive for many Republicans during the 1950s campaign which resulted in several border stations being bombed and captures the growing sense of alarm within communities still suffering from the fear and trauma of war. The patrolling of the border and its accompanying propaganda concerning national safety was set up during the Second World War when the Free State’s neutrality was seen as a threat to the stability of the North. The policing of the border was chaotic during the post-war periods as it was performed by local men known as the black and tans because of the mixture of ex-army and navy uniforms. In this story Matthew, a school Headmaster is imprisoned when he falsely takes responsibility for the hand-grenades that are found in the outhouses on the school premises. The story is told by the wife who is angry at her husband leaving her to struggle to provide for their four children, while ironically he gains stature through an apparent act of sacrifice to the cause. Instead of the drudgery of hard work, “he will imagine another side to his empty life as a revolutionary in a trench coat” (Beckett 82). Her bitterness is centred in how their lives are divided by gender by highlighting the reality behind the male bravado of Republicanism that places the men as heroes when it is the women who prove their strength of character. Beckett depicts this in such a way as to foreshadow problems that re-appear in the Troubles. Beckett is attempting to show the gap between the nostalgic confabulation and the hardships that the fighting has wrought for the women within these communities.

Beckett draws her female characters as active agents of their own decisions, striving for a positive future. These are not Mother-Ireland figures calling for blood, but strong modern women taking control, often against social convention. She captures the atmosphere of grief and division, alongside hope for a better future in the ending of “The Pursuit of Happiness”. This story has been described by Howard as typifying Beckett’s writing in its depiction of the “survival of the spirit within circumstances that would diminish or destroy it” (Howard 154). Josephine, a modern woman who is struggling against her overwhelming grief over the death of her fiancé, realises she can control her future:

She had it then in the power of a jerk of her wrist to cut off the light [...] On an impulse she whirled back the wine velvet with a clatter of rings so that the whole stretch of the road was laid open with the flashing blade of a curved sword. Some time outside her power the rain would cease, and the light would rest in calm, broad, shining peace. (Beckett 31)

The dynamism behind this action turns the young woman into a sword-wielding warrior who can fight in hope of “the pursuit of happiness” of the title. The title suggests a reference to the American Declaration of Independence, with its claim that every man or woman should have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and is also therefore a reference to the changes that will culminate in the Civil Rights movement. In this image Beckett juxtaposes the word “peace” with images of war and the rain, which was used throughout to connect war and grief, but is now changed by the light from the window. Josephine is given a glimpse of a future beyond the trauma and grief of war, but Beckett indicates that this will only happen if women take action to help bring this peace. The war remains not as echoes of the past, but in the present day ripples moving the pain from the past towards the violence that is to come. Taken as a whole these stories offer a snapshot of the years preceding the Troubles and point to the fracturing of identity within the collective psyche. Beckett brings her theme of war to the fore in her signature story from the collection, which ties together the traumas of the various twentieth century wars fought on Irish soil to show the inter-generational return of repressed trauma.

A Belfast Woman

The use of first person narrative in the much-anthologised “A Belfast Woman” enables an identification with the protagonist’s emotional struggle, which is told retrospectively with an emphasis on leaving of homes, fear or threat of physical harm or death, husbands dying and the mother’s scream. At the centre of the story are the motifs of burning, sickness and fear of death, which express the protagonist’s trauma as physical and mental scarring. The permanent nature of the traumatic past is represented in the scarring on her arm. Mary’s earliest memory is of her mother screaming on the night the family are burnt out of their home. Mary’s fear over her family’s safety is expressed as her fear of death, which remains in her unconscious, seeping into her nightmares. Fourteen years later the trauma is repeated when Mary receives a threatening letter, which this time allows her family to escape before any harm occurs. Beckett suggests that trauma is not only repeated or returned to in an individual’s life but is also a cross-

generational problem. The burning out of the family home is the repetition of a trauma from previous generations and times, and as such engages with the repetitive nature of trauma, which in Freudian terms can be described as the return of the repressed. Mary, Mary's mother and Mary's grandfather have all suffered from the same pattern of burning, making it part of her family history. Mary's memory of her father's death is linked to the trauma of her grandfather being burnt out of their home in Lisburn as she entwines the story of the burning to the story of her father's collapse and subsequent death brought on when trying to help his father pull out an old tree stump from the country garden. This suggests the 'rooted' nature of the trauma in her family history and its pattern of interconnection: "all the long white roots and threads" (Beckett 87). Trying to acknowledge, expose or remove the root is connected to Mary's fear of death, which is later depicted as a cancerous growth that she imagines, like the tree, to be growing and spreading its roots throughout her womb. This suggests Mary sees the traumas of the past like a disease that, because of its situation in her reproductive organs, will prevent a positive future for her children. By producing children she views herself as responsible for creating a new generation that may repeat the same traumas.

The original definition of trauma, which emphasises its physical nature as a wound, is captured in Beckett's tropes of scars, fear of cancer and open wounds. She engages with trauma as a metaphorical cluster of past, present and future woundings. Beckett emphasises through Mary's expressions how her trauma exists in both her body and her mind with phrases such as: "I *mind* well the day the threatening letter came" and that "it would be nice if the Troubles were over so that a *body* could just enjoy the feel of a good day" (Beckett 84 and 85, italics added). Her trauma is both an emotional and a physical scarring. This is not unusual in Beckett's writing and she acknowledges the trope of scarring as a metaphor or symbol for Northern Ireland in her description of an incident that happened to her as a girl when a piece of flesh was removed from her leg to leave a scar the shape of Lough Neagh. The same Lough Neagh-shaped scar is also found on Nora in Beckett's "Failing Years". Beckett links the accident that makes a "pea-sized lump of her flesh separate", to the burning, "put it in the fire", the memories of the sinking of the Titanic and "that the ugly scar was exactly the shape of Lough Neagh", which connects the creation of the separate North to the traumas of the past (Beckett 105). Northern Ireland is as Sullivan points out "quite literally, inscribed upon Nora's body" (Sullivan 11). Beckett identifies her own scar with the nostalgia for a sense of place that can be "imprinted on her body" so that "you can't detach yourself"

(Beckett: Sullivan 11). This is a visible marker into which the emotional trauma can be metaphorically placed, which depicts the division or rupturing of Northern Ireland as a trauma to the physical body. What is impossible to describe as a physical landscape because it does not exist as such can therefore then be rendered concrete in physical terms on the bodies of the fictional characters. This description of the scarring highlights how trauma is permanent; it is impossible to fully heal the body after a physical wounding, and it is impossible in emotional terms to get back to the pre-trauma time. The permanence of the wounds on the living body thus expresses the permanent damage to the psyche of the people living within a divided land.

The repetition of the trope of burning as an expression of a generational trauma is important as it suggests the repetitious nature of the trauma of war and violence in Irish history. The trauma of loss of the home is a historical reality in Irish history beginning in the early days of Partition. It is significant that Beckett chose her character's first memory to be the early burnings from 1920, as the division of Ireland happened in 1920 through the Government of Ireland Act, which was passed as a direct result of the first Bloody Sunday. This had an immediate violent reaction from all parties and led to riots on 12th July 1921, when over 200 Catholic homes were destroyed, many injured and 25 people died. Beckett's rippling foam and water in her story "Flags and Emblem" was metaphorically exploring her idea that the Troubles are the product of the Partition, and the subsequent divisions that were set up between nationalist and unionist politics. Other stories such as "Master and the Bombs" point to the unnatural divisions that were created by the political border and how the neutrality of the Republic during the Second World War created an ideological barrier and psychic rift between the two sections of Ireland. This story however moves closer to looking at how Belfast's specific history was impacted by these divisions and the scarring that was deepened with each new trauma.

The cluster of images and tropes, which Beckett repeats throughout "A Belfast Woman" foregrounds Mary's childhood memories of her initial trauma of burning and her mother's screams as she stood in the middle of the flaming house. This scene becomes central to understanding Mary's trauma as representing women's experiences of the Troubles:

One of the first things I remember in my life was waking up with my mother screaming downstairs when we were burnt out in 1921. I ran down in my

nightgown and my mother was standing in the middle of the kitchen with her hands up to her face screaming and screaming and the curtains were on fire and my father was pulling them down and stamping on them with the flames catching the oilcloth on the floor. [...] It was a warm summer night and the fires were crackling all over the place and the street was covered with broken glass. It wasn't until we got into my grandmother's house that anybody noticed that I had nothing on but my nightie and nothing on my feet and they were cut. It was all burnt, everything they had. (Beckett 84-5)

The house and the street where Mary grew up are representations of the familiar world, which connects her identity and world view and now these are under threat of destruction, Mary becomes wounded. This is expressed in the image of the young girl wounding her feet as she runs for safety through the broken glass on the streets. Her parent's neglect in ensuring her safety from harm, her mother's screams of fear and the loss of her home are images that are repeated manifold times throughout the novel. Therefore this scene requires some in-depth analysis to understand the impact of the trauma and the way it represents both the individual woman's trauma and its connection to past generations, and how Beckett considers Mary's trauma as representative of the Catholic Belfast woman's experiences.

Repetition is both a symptom of post-trauma and a trope that can be used to represent the trauma. In Freudian terms, Martha's generational pattern of losing one's home from burning points back to the original trauma of the first burning, which in itself may be linked to the trauma of the national psyche. Freud considered the role of repetition in his work on the trauma of war in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* where he positioned his grandson's game of *fort-da* as representative of the repetitive nature of trauma. He also explores the wish fulfilment involved in the repetitive nature of soldiers' dreams of the battlefield, which he concludes could not be a fulfilment of desire but rather an encounter with death. Freud considers the repetition compulsion of throwing away and retrieving to be linked in the child's mind to the pain when his mother departs and his joy at her return. He subsequently links this to the father's departure for war and to the mother's death. Freud suggests the game symbolises the return of the repressed trauma and how the effects of an earlier trauma form into the repetition of a specific pattern of behaviour or the reoccurring of events. Mary can thus be seen to be repeating a suppressed family trauma, which relates to the national trauma. Eric Santner in his study of the representations of trauma, "History Beyond the Pleasure Principle" considers Freud's work on repetition-compulsion as suggesting that the symbolic or dialogical repetition of the trauma is a response to a loss that will not go away. He sees Freud's

fort-da game as an act of mourning, a primitive ritual signifying the loss of the mother, which gives agency over the emotions by substitution (Santner 144). Taking this into consideration, it is possible to see Mary's later action, whereby she causes wounding to her own body, as a way of physically mourning for her family. Santner considers this form of repetition as similar to homeopathy whereby the dangerous substance, the trauma, is given in such small doses that it allows control over the pain. In this way, by returning to the trauma, Mary can be considered to have found a way to enable her to express and to contain the pain of the original trauma.

Mary's scarring and the trauma of loss are interlinked in her story. Her mother associates ill-health with the burning out from their home, which left them not only with no possessions but with permanent physical damage. Mary's mother suggests both her heart problems and the early death of her husband are related to the family's earlier trauma:

Every now and then she'd say this would never have happened if she hadn't been burnt out of her home down near the docks and had to go half roads up the mountains with all the hills and the air too strong for her. "And your father wouldn't have got consumption if he hadn't had to move in with my mother and spend his days at the street corner. (Beckett 89)

The trauma destroyed the family home and split the family, which lost her father his job and his health. He was infected by the TB that was rife in the poverty stricken post-war era: "He used to say 'When you have no house and no job sure what use are you?' and then he'd get fits of coughing" (Beckett 85). Mary's father was physically and emotionally scarred by the burning out: TB presents itself as scarring of the lungs therefore suggesting the connection between the trauma and his death. When Mary's mother dies, Mary describes her death as losing her own identity, as her mother's body was the only physical reminder of her childhood: "all I could do was shiver inside myself as if my shelter had been taken away" (Beckett 89). The use of the word "shelter" here shows how the loss of her mother is linked in Mary's mind with the loss of her home. With her mother's death there is a link to the return of the trauma of losing her childhood home and all that she associated with a sense of security.

Shortly after her mother's death, Mary reproduces this psychic scarring by physically scarring her own body by pushing her arm through the school window in an emotional response to the teacher beating her daughter. When Mary's daughter arrives home from

school crying and visibly marked by the teacher's cane, this reactivates Mary's anger and fear at the scarring of her own feet in her childhood trauma. She symbolically becomes her mother by putting on the black shawl that her mother always wore and which set her apart from her modern, urban Protestant neighbours. Mary acts to defend her ten year old daughter in an action that suggests she is nurturing her own traumatised inner child:

A big red mark it was right across the back of her legs. And she had lovely skin on her legs, lovely creamy skin. When I think of it I can still see that mark. I didn't ask her what happened. I just lifted my mother's shawl from where it was still hanging on the back of the kitchen door and I flung it round me and ran down to the school. [...] My arm stuck in through the glass panel and I pulled it out with a big deep cut from my wrist to my elbow. (Beckett 90)

Mary is physically reliving the trauma of loss by connecting to the lost mother through the symbolic wearing of her shawl. The loss of the mother is connected to the loss of 'home' and Mary embodies this trauma by physically creating a scar on her body. The breaking of the glass of the window and the cutting of her arm relives the cutting of her feet on the broken glass that Mary ran through on the night of the burnings. This is an emblematic moment in the story as Beckett reproduces several images connected to the death of traditional Ireland such as the black shawl-wearing Mother Ireland and the creation of the bloodied red hand. The Red Hand is a historic symbol for nationalists who see it as representing the nine counties of Ulster, and for unionists who see it as representing the six counties of Northern Ireland. It is one of the only emblems used by both communities in Northern Ireland, although it has recently become more associated with the Protestant community, but can be used as an image to indicate the whole nation. In this scene therefore Beckett is showing how the individual trauma of Mary is as a direct result of the national trauma of Partition; how the creation of Northern Ireland as a separate political entity signalled the death of Ireland as a whole country and the resulting bloody scar of that severing in two. This second scarring of Mary's arm, with its connection to the imagery of burning and Mary's fight to save her child, can be considered as specifically relevant to Freud's case study of the burning child, which he uses to discuss the nature of trauma.

Freud's story of the burning child, which was part of *The Interpretation of Dreams* has been used by several theorists to explore the effects of trauma. In this story a father is awoken by the dream of his child pulling on his arm saying "father do you not see I am

burning". He goes into the adjoining room to find the old man he had asked to watch and pray over his dead child's body asleep and the candles setting fire to the child's arm. Freud illustrates how the father may have been alerted by some physical sign to the burning, through the smell of smoke or sound of flames but, in his unconscious desire to keep the child alive, his conscious mind delivers the message as if the child was once again speaking to him. The father's unconscious imagining that the child was alive, delays the body from awakening during an emergency that demands a quick response to save the old man, the house and the child's body from further scarring. However the delay allows the father to experience the child as still alive, thus it acts as a wish fulfilment, by serving to repress the reality of the child's death. Beckett's connection of children, burning and scarred arms suggest a deliberate reference to this exploration of trauma, death and wish-fulfilment. Therefore it is possible to read Mary's re-enactment of the night of her trauma as an unconscious wish-fulfilment to have the mother still alive and to protect the young child (herself) from harm. In Mary's situation the mother is unable to protect her child because she is in shock and Mary is scarred from the broken glass and her near-death experiences. By returning to the burning motif, the trauma of that night is conveyed as a wish-fulfilment and part of the repetition of Mary's unconscious traumas.

In Freudian terms repetition can be considered as a refusal to accept the reality of the trauma and a hidden wish to keep the child alive, but for Lacan it is a way to clarify and accept the reality of the moment that was initially too unbearable for the father. Lacan in his study of Freud's interpretation of the burning child dream revises Freud's conclusions of wish-fulfilment by asking what then awakens the father to reality: is it not that the dream is a repetition of the missed reality of the death? The image of the child as alive may have delayed the awakening, but the conscious mind forces an awakening by registering the knowledge of the death. The dream allows the father to bring his emotional response into his conscious mind and remember to acknowledge the loss. The words spoken by the child 'burn' into his conscious mind, achieving a representation of the pain experienced by the child as it lay dying and of the pain of grief experienced initially by the father at the moment of death. Reality according to Lacan is the traumatic emotional moment that the father could not experience in his conscious mind. An alternative reading of Mary's actions therefore could be that the mother's death brought the trauma to the surface, which allowed Mary to acknowledge her scarring. Thus the hidden trauma becomes a new visible physical wound. In

addition, because the re-enactment of the trauma resulted in further scarring, when Mary pushed her arm through the glass window, Beckett could be suggesting the repetitive or circular nature of trauma and that the reliving of the trauma will result in further scarring.

The burning child story can help to explore the repetition that occurs in trauma in the father's first experiences of the traumatic death of his child and his own continuing life, which is then re-experienced through the awakening to the death of his child. Beckett shows through multiple repetitions in her story how the lives of the whole family are linked together through their overlapping experiences and through their bodies. Mary describes her husband's death as "the same disease as my mother's" and his sudden collapse is described as similar to the death of her grandfather (Beckett 93). Mary's father's loss of his home and his job is repeated in Mary's own experiences and in her son Liam's:

He got married to a nice wee girl from the Bone and they got a house up in one of the nice streets in Ardoyne - up at the far end in what they call now a mixed area. It's all gone now, poor Liam's way of living. When that street of houses up there was put on fire in 1972 [...] Then when the murders got bad his partner asked him not to come back to work any more because he'd been threatened for working with a Catholic. (Beckett 92-3)

In the same way that Mary's father had been forced out of his home and job, so her son also loses everything because of political violence. Mary's fear that trauma will be repeated has proved true, both in her own home and in her son's home. Although Mary's experiences of her early childhood trauma continue to be repeated, they change with each resurfacing with respect to Mary's agency. In the 1921 event Mary was the passive frightened child dependent on her parents and suffering from their lack of protection, as symbolised in her undressed state and the cuts on her feet. When in 1935 a second burning of the houses occurs, it is Mary who opens the letter, tells her mother they must leave, saves their belongings and uses the letter to get them a new home close to the mills so they are all able to get jobs. The mother's warning screams are repeated when Mary, upon marrying William, moves into his aunt's house: "my mother was in a terrible state. 'Don't go into that Protestant street, Mary, or you'll be sorry girl'" (Beckett 85). Mary eventually finds her mother's words come true when she is forced once again to leave an area because she is a Catholic. Her early childhood trauma returns to her again after a note is put through her letter box saying "Get out or we'll

burn you out”. In her childhood experience, Mary’s mother does nothing except scream and it is the father who has to try to put out the fire and remind the mother of the need to ensure the children’s safety. However, when Mary relives this experience she protects where her mother did not, and she leaves before the flames take control. Mary proves that she can provide safety and protection for her family as she takes them safely away from the danger. Her second awakening to this event in the earlier experience with the teacher and the scarring of her arm showed how Mary can be proactive, watching out for the child in danger rather than screaming in fear. In all of these losses of homes and losses of family through death there is a repeated pattern connecting them to Mary’s memory of her first trauma of the burning house.

Mary’s experience is that of a child awoken by the screams of her mother to find the burning curtains engulfing her father’s arm as he tries to put out the flames. This is a direct reversal of Freud’s story, as it is the child awoken by the parent’s voice to see the parents burning. The young child is traumatised by the realisation that her parents are vulnerable to attack and that they cannot protect her from harm: they have not acted adequately. The parents as protectors figuratively die for Mary at this moment, resulting in the trauma of the possibility of death, but she is unable to ‘know’ the story of this experience. Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience* explores Lacan’s analysis of Freud, by suggesting that trauma remains as an act of seeing which is not experienced or remembered in the conscious mind in the same way as non-traumatic facts. Caruth states that traumatic events are separated by the “inability to know” or remember the trauma as a clear narrated event. The fragmented and incomplete nature of the trauma leads to a re-experiencing of that moment in an attempt at interpretation by the conscious mind. Caruth considers how in Freud’s story, the father remains outside the moment of trauma as he has no knowledge of death itself and does not therefore know how to respond to the event; the trauma thus remains as a missing experience. This would suggest that Mary is at the centre of a story of trauma, where the burning keeps repeating because the past traumas are unknowable. The trauma suffered by her mother is relived by Mary in her dreams and in reality. When she achieves the role of protector she no longer feels the need to run or hide away from the experience. She acts to protect her own children as she would wish to be protected. In her daughter-in-law’s home she sees the love and trust in her grand-daughter’s eyes and knows she must do all she can as the mother-figure to protect and not be frightened. She says to her daughter-in-law, “Don’t scream Gemma, Don’t ever scream, do you hear me” (Beckett 95). In this way

she is preventing her grand-daughter from the fear and nightmares Mary herself suffered from witnessing her own mother's screams of fear. Mary's role is to prevent a repetition of the trauma, to respond appropriately, to 'bear witness' to the event, to the deaths and memorialise the traumas. Beckett suggests that the telling of the history of trauma is as important as the trauma itself: "It took a long time to heal and the scar will never leave me. The story went around the parish in different ways. [...] I was too ashamed to explain" (Beckett 91). When Mary is unable to exercise agency and witness to her own trauma, she has to suffer the impact of other people's readings of her actions.

Beckett's "A Belfast Woman" is also the story of the creation of Northern Ireland as a national trauma, which began with the Partition and is repeated in the violence of the subsequent years throughout Northern Ireland's history. Beckett engages with the birthing myth which has been utilised in a variety of forms in Irish literature to describe this period of history. The key image here is of an unknown sickness or growth in Mary's womb: "Then I started having trouble. I looked as if I was expecting again and my stomach was hard and round but I had bleeding and I could feel no life so I was afraid" (Beckett 86). The creation of the separate state of Northern Ireland is therefore visualised as a false pregnancy, which births pain rather than life. Mary's use of the term "trouble" works to connect the creation of Northern Ireland with the Troubles that are to follow. Mary suffers throughout this period of her life from painful symptoms that she assumes are the symptoms of terminal cancer. The cancer is linked in her mind with the weeds in her father-in-law's garden, the death of her father and through them to the wider socio-cultural context:

At times I'd see against my closed eyes the white long roots of the cancer growing all over my inside and I'd remember the first time William brought me to see his father in the country. [...] and he said: 'sitfast and scotch! Sitfast and scotch! They're the plague of my life. No matter how much I weed there's more in the morning.' (Beckett 87)

The weeds growing in the Irish soil are not all native to the area. Sitfast is the English name for a type of Irish buttercup that has developed to grow on particularly damp soil, whereas scotch is a pioneer weed that takes over and colonises the area to which it is introduced. These names therefore suggest the fight between the native Irish and the Anglo or Scotch-Irish and thus again references the unionist and nationalist divisions and the battle for ownership of the ground. Martha's father-in-law was a Protestant ploughman and his mother was a Catholic, who died when William was a young boy.

William was brought up Catholic according to his mother's wishes, but this could not have been easy for his father, particularly as he lived in a close-knit unionist community. William is therefore the hope for a way forward where both communities can live together. For now, however, there is an acknowledgement that both Mary and her husband's families have suffered trauma from the political events that were happening around them. Mary's cancer is linked in her story to the weeds and is therefore a further metaphor for the growing and spreading of the trauma from the initial birthing of Northern Ireland. Beckett's depiction of the trauma as a cancer and as the roots of weeds focuses on how it spreads through the body or the land to bring about sickness and death. However, the doctor's diagnosis during the second half of the story proves it was not cancer and that she is well again, which suggests there may be a positive future ahead.

Beckett acknowledges the scarring of the individual in the North of Ireland and describes the emotional trauma created by the division or rupturing of a whole into two halves as a trauma to the physical body. What is impossible to describe as a physical landscape because it does not exist as such can therefore be recognised in physical form on the bodies of the fictional characters. Beckett is rendering concrete the impact of the war, the influence of the Irish-British conflict and the social unrest upon the individual and collective psyche. What is important about this is that the scarring is permanent; it is impossible to get back to the pre-trauma time. However, as several of Beckett's images suggest, there may be hope for a positive future despite the scarring from past wounds. This is epitomised in the final image in the story of the sun setting over Belfast:

“They tell me Belfast has the best [sunsets] and do you know why? It's because of all the smoke and dirt and dust and pollution. And it seems to me,” he said, “it seems to me that if the dirt and dust and smoke and pollution of Belfast just with the help of the sun can make a sky like that, then there's hope for all of us.” [...] well, anyway, if you don't die you live through it, day in, day out. (Beckett 98-99)

The sun in this scene is connected to the image of the sun and the rain in Beckett's other stories. However Mary, who has lived through the trauma of many decades of violence and war, is not as positive as the salesman who sees hope in the beauty of the sunset. She warns the young people that the Civil Rights marches would “all lead to shootings and burnings and murder”, which suggests once again the cyclical and repetitive nature of trauma (Beckett 98). Mary considers the birth of her grandchild as something

positive for the future, but does not think this will remove the possibility of the traumas re-emerging. Belfast remains in this final scene, clothed in smoke, thus suggesting the memory of the burnings remains and the hope that Mary sees lies only in being able to survive.

Give Them Stones

Give Them Stones spans sixty years, including the Second World War and the onset of the Troubles. The first person narrator, Martha Murtagh, is a strong woman who heroically stands up against the warring voices destroying her local community. Martha, who was born on the day of the General Strike in January 1927, which highlights the importance of working class politics, describes in detail her experiences of the trauma and hardships faced by the working class communities of inner Belfast. Martha is deeply affected by the Second World War and her father's Internment, which destroys her family life and causes deep wounds particularly for her and her brother Danny. This is further emphasised when she is evacuated to the apple-growing countryside surrounding Armagh. Martha, like many of the women in Beckett's stories, is not a passive romantic heroine, but an ordinary, realistic woman fighting for what she wants. She takes up the metaphorical sword depicted by Josephine in "The Pursuit of Happiness" and stands against the aggressive actions of the IRA, like a lone warrior against an army of men who intimidate the local community, demanding protection money and kneecapping teenagers. She suffers the consequences of war when the IRA retaliate by burning down her home and bakery. Like a soldier, she witnesses the horrors of war and fights for her personal freedom to choose how to live her life.

Beckett uses several tropes to highlight the importance of generational trauma within the novel. The image of the house symbolises the decay of the previous generation and the ongoing sorrows from the past. Martha describes her grandmother's house where she grew up as "fit for nothing but demolition" but still standing as in reserve in case "there's another bout of burning" (Beckett 11). They were basic to begin with but the government, instead of trying to improve the facilities painted flowers on the gable wall, "then somebody battered a hole right through them and the slates slid off year after year" (Beckett 12). The house symbolises the poverty of those who lived in it showing how, instead of the state providing help and financial support, the house was exposed to further violence, which echoes the violence against the Catholic population during this

period. Within the home the power lies with the matriarchal grandmother, which is shown in the scene where the father wants Martha to continue at school, but the grandmother makes the decision to send her to work. The school had summoned the father as the patriarchal head of the home, but inside the house he has no power. With no paid employment for men, it is the women who hold the financial responsibility and therefore have more power within their household. Martha's father was very different to the other men in the area as he helped with childcare and housework when it could be done unseen within the home. This changes when the burning and shooting begins, as her uncle Jimmy is imprisoned and her father stands in solidarity on the street corners neglecting the chores. This signifies the continuing patriarchal social mores that govern the public places, despite the power balance shift within the house. Beckett thus acknowledges the powerful women who work hard both inside and outside the home to keep the family alive and well, and the difficulties that the men face without work and with pressure from outside the home that prevent them taking up domestic work that would help with family life.

Martha has a close relationship to her father who influences her political consciousness through his story-telling. Beckett notes how the role of the father is linked to the passing on of Republicanism, with the older generation of men "telling their dreams and stories to their children" (Beckett: Sullivan 11). The end to family unity is forecast by the grandmother's death, which is connected to the start of the Second World War, but it is another death that signifies the death of the family and the horror of Internment. The death of a baby boy foreshadows the missing male bodies that are to come:

[Daddy] was taken away by the police early one morning shortly after that with Uncle Jimmy and the other men and interned in an old boat on Strangford Lough. My mother never complained, never missed a day at work until she had a baby four months later. It was a wee boy but it died the day after it was born. (Beckett 29)

The death of the male, or the missing male body, is repeated throughout this novel as a symbol of Martha and her family's trauma: the death of the male child is a metaphor for the missing bodies of the men who have died, joined the army, or been interned. Martha's grandfather is another missing male figure, having gone on an assisted passage to America after losing his job in the ship-yard in 1921. This is another reference to the trauma of the Partition years and the resulting missing body that created a gap in the family life. In this time of war the trauma is being inflicted on the male body and the

women suffer the losses. When Martha considers herself through her father's eyes she see the strain that war and Internment have placed upon a fourteen year old girl who has to work full shifts at the linen mill to help support the family. Martha describes how she would "look at myself in my father's shaving mirror over the sink and my face would be grey with bad air and tiredness" (Beckett 29). The connection between her current haggard state and her father's mirror suggests the reason for her exhaustion is his missing role in the family. Her imprisoned father was unable to provide for her future, so she must turn to her own resources and those of the women in her family for help and it is the female line of the family who give her strength and encouragement that enable her to find a better way to provide for her future.

Beckett connects the two experiences of war by opening the novel with a critique of the Troubles, before returning to the Second World War years and in both sections of the novel she depicts the police shooting of a young man. Martha's first encounter with violent death is the shooting of a neighbour's son who had joined the British army because there was no work, but when he refused to go back after leave, the military police shoot and beat him to death. When Martha knelt down beside the coffin to pray, she felt sick with fear for her own father's safety. There are echoes of this in the knee-capping of the boy against Martha's wall as both were punishment shootings by self-imposed authority figures, working outside the law to inflict trauma on the body of a youth they were supposed to protect. Beckett considers violence like the roots of the cancer in "A Belfast Woman" spreading out through the community and down through the years. Martha describes how the trauma of the knee-capping brings to the surface the memory of her school principal, Miss Killeen repeatedly slapping the hands of her school friend Lizzy for knocking over a tin of biscuits. Like the boy from the knee-capping, Lizzie had cried throughout for her mammy: "We were there standing in our seats or out on the floor gaping but we didn't do anything. My skin was all goosepimples with horror. Two or three other teachers had come in but nobody stopped Miss Killeen" (Beckett 26). Martha feels the horror of helplessly witnessing this act of violence and being unable to stop it. In her imagination she returns to the scene and conjures up ganging together as a group or making the other teachers intervene, and she is horrified not only with the incident itself but that no one did anything to condemn the beating, not even Lizzie's own family. By not intervening Martha felt complicit with the action and decides to punish herself by refusing her scholarship. She is so traumatised

by the scene that she cannot continue as she was before: being a witness to violence has changed her.

Beckett signals the importance of witnessing by positioning Martha in the opening scene of the novel as a witness to the trauma of a shooting. Martha, who has had her childhood traumas returned to her through this scene, makes a difficult decision with respect to her role as witness; she chooses to speak out, to become an active voice in condemning the violence and horror. Martha is refusing to be complicit in the IRA's actions, which she sees as using physical trauma on a young body to send a symbolic message to the community against defying paramilitary laws. The youth's body becomes a site of trauma carrying the message of the power relationship between rule enforcer and community. Jenny Edkins considers the role of witnessing victimisation as a trauma in itself: "Witnessing violence done to others and surviving can seem to be as traumatic as suffering brutality oneself. Here a sense of shame is paramount. The survivor feels complicit in the betrayal perpetrated by others" (Edkins 4). What Edkins is highlighting is the sense of responsibility which creates feelings of shame and complicity. Martha feels a sense of guilt and ownership over this shooting when she firstly states that it was on her property, "up against my wall" and then reveals how she was unable to prevent them from continuing their actions: "I shouted at them what did they think they were doing and then they shot him in the other leg and ran away" (Beckett 9). The neighbours call upon her to take action and she rings the hospital but can do little else except try to remove the traces of what happened, both literally and metaphorically washing away her guilt at being unable to prevent the shooting:

When they had all gone I brought out buckets of water and a yard brush and washed and washed at the place although there was little sign that anything had happened. All the time I was brushing I was telling myself that I couldn't keep quiet about this. I had kept my head down long enough, so careful of myself, frightened of any change, never taking any risks. But I'd have no respect for myself if I didn't let them know what I thought. (Beckett 9-10)

Martha's washing signals her rejection of complicity and guilt and her determination to bear witness to the trauma. By demonstrating her rejection of the IRA's right to abuse bodies, Martha absolves herself of responsibility; to stay quiet was to remain complicit and to accept the traumatic action as politically justifiable. Martha later sets out the argument in her head to try to understand if this action was justifiable but she can find no way to condone it: "If they had shot him only the once I might have persuaded

myself [he was guilty of something deserving of this] but I lay awake with his crying in my head” (Beckett 10). Martha could have ‘kept her head down’ as she and others in the area had done previously if she had not actually been physically present when they had shot the second bullet; it is her physical seeing of the trauma that produces her need to bear witness to the “horror” of the violence, which is now no longer ideological or imagined but a real event of which she was a part, albeit as a witness and not a participant.

Martha’s response to witnessing the knee-capping is to refuse to pay her protection money to the IRA: “I’d tell them they were getting no more from me in their weekly collection and I’d tell them why” (Beckett 10). Martha turns her witnessing into testimony and speaks out to refute their violent actions. She sees her payment toward their funding as being complicit, as she had done with the school funding; she refuses to continue to agree with the authority of an organisation that uses human bodies to make political points. Elaine Scarry notes in *The Body in Pain* how torture, which is the infliction of pain upon a body, is an act of war that produces fear of death as it acts out the destruction and killing upon the individual body:

Torture [like bombing in war] is a parallel act of deconstruction. It imitates the destructive power of war: rather than destroying the concrete physical fact of streets, houses, factories, and schools, it destroys them as they exist in the mind of the prisoner, [...] torture usually mimes the killing of people by inflicting pain, the sensory equivalent of death, substituting prolonged mock execution for execution. (Scarry 61)

Martha’s witnessing of the shooting was therefore similar to a mock execution; the youth was fired upon and fainted to the ground. Trauma exists in the knowledge that the group inflicting the wounding on both her and the youth, was not the British army, whom she would see as the enemy, but the very people who have set themselves up as her protectorate, the very people to whom she pays money for enabling her welfare and safety. Martha has been changed by this event, which sits as a trauma within her body, changing her relationships to her family, her community, the IRA and to her sense of self as it exists within her national identity. The violent realities of the war for a united Ireland have changed Martha’s understanding of her father’s nostalgic stories of Ireland’s struggle for freedom into a history of trauma. She now withdraws her consent to be any part of the IRA’s violent policies and strives to help her community survive

the war. She may wish for social and political change but she denies that violence is a justifiable part of this struggle.

War has a dramatic impact on family life. During World War Two, on the 16th April 1941, in one night, over two hundred planes repeatedly dropped bombs on Belfast resulting in the death of 745 people, thousands were severely injured, and a quarter of the population of Belfast were made homeless (Maguire 183). Such statistics make this the worst bombing during the war outside of London and it is therefore surprising that there are few literary accounts or critical works concerning this event. Martha's first knowledge of the war comes from the radio as she is sitting in her home performing domestic chores:

On the Sunday war was declared Mary Brigid and I were sitting on our beds darning Granny's old black woollen stockings for her to start school the next day. The thunder was brattling and my father was saying that it didn't matter much about school because we'd likely be all killed before the end of the year. We were giggling because we were nervous and excited and my mother was making black-out curtains for half the street. (Beckett 28)

The serious nature of war is interwoven with the practical preparations, as the sewing is changed from clothing to war work. On the surface this would appear to be a domestic scene, but already it is signalling the move of the women into the war-work, as they prepare their home against attack. Martha's experience of the bombing breaks down the concept of public and private and the sense of a home as a protective space. Her description of the night of the Blitz place the mother and young children in the domesticity of the kitchen, which is now the centre of a war-zone:

Mary Brigid and I clutched each other and said our rosary out loud to try and stop hearing the explosions and the planes and the collapse of buildings all over our end of town. [...] At one stage I thought the house was wrecked when the door and front windows blew in and the upstairs ceilings came down. [...] houses were wrecked two streets away and people killed and whole blocks of houses down. [...] We gathered up our nightclothes and walked over broken glass and gritty dust. (Beckett 30)

With no weapons to defend themselves, the young girls are left with only their prayers to protect the family. This graphically captures the lack of provisions available to protect the Northern Irish during World War Two for, as Maguire notes in his history of Belfast, the City was poorly prepared to cope with the Blitz: "When the blitz came in April 1941 most of the people in Belfast had no physical protection. There were no

shelters even for the 30,000 workers engaged in vital war work, let alone for ten times that number of ordinary citizens who had been promised them at the start of the war” (Maguire 155-6). The warning siren was not used when almost 30,000 bombs were dropped on the densely populated housing areas of Belfast, killing almost 1000 people, injuring many more and creating horrific damage to over 53,000 homes. Beckett captures the emotional realities beyond the statistics and brings the shock of the trauma to the fore.

There are echoes of “A Belfast Woman” in Beckett’s description of Martha’s experiences, as both protagonists must walk over broken glass to escape the destruction of their home, but in this narrative Martha is fully dressed, carrying rather than wearing her night-clothes and with shoes to protect her feet. Martha’s mother does not scream during the assault on the house, but holds onto her children to save them from harm. She initiates the evacuation to the country where she leaves them safely away from the bombing zone. Beckett therefore shows the difference between the strength of Martha’s mother and Mary’s mother’s passive responses. In a further repetition of Mary’s story, Martha, on leaving her home, is described with sores on her feet:

My mother covered my feet with her two hands and began to rub the soles of them with her thumbs. The she said, ‘Martha, love, your feet. They’re all corns!’ I told her I knew that but it didn’t matter. They did hurt a bit as if I had little stones in my shoes but I didn’t tell her that - I knew it was from standing in the mill. (Beckett 33)

Martha’s scarred feet have not come, as did Mary’s from the broken glass of the burning houses, but have developed over time due to the harsh working conditions of the mill. Martha’s reason for being in the mill is her refusal to take up a scholarship that she had felt she did not deserve as a direct result of witnessing Lizzie’s beating. Her mother symbolically places her hands around her daughter’s scarred feet in a sign of love and protection. Martha’s mother also acts to protect her by leaving her in the country, but this however creates a further sense of abandonment and homesickness in Martha who sees herself as separated from her family. Although her home was not damaged during the bombing, Martha has been made homeless by her mother’s decision.

Beckett draws a contrast between the war zone of Belfast and the blossom-filled country roads of Aghalee, which Martha describes as, “like a fairy story with the birds singing and a blue sky” (Beckett 30). This is the land of her father and grandfather, in sharp

contrast to the urban factory sites of her mother and grandmother. When her mother returns to Belfast to continue work, Martha remains with the two elderly aunts and her experience of the war is now from afar. The war turns the young Martha effectively into an orphan, who lives with the daily worry that both her parents will die or suffer severe injuries that will separate her from them forever. This action deepens the sense of loss that Martha has already experienced through the loss of her father and, like Mary she never recovers from the trauma of a severed childhood. Martha must witness the second blitz as an unknown trauma and can only guess how it has harmed her home and her family. She can hear the “crump” sound of the bombs and see “the red in the sky from the fires” but is disorientated by her unfamiliar surroundings (Beckett 37). Martha had become familiar with the fear of death when she was in her own home and it, like her longing for a united Ireland, acts like the pebbles in her shoes that she had ignored despite the way they had been harming her feet over the years. She is ashamed of her relief at not being in the middle of the “noise and terror” but has to wait until the next night before she receives a letter confirming that the bombs were in the city centre and that her family are all safe. The emotional helplessness detaches her from her family as she is now living outside their experiences.

Martha’s experiences in the country defy traditional gender divisions as she witnesses a boy knitting a red jumper and she sees women doing hard work in the fields, one of them cutting the turf while wearing a man’s panama hat. The teacher, Miss Rankin becomes an influential female figure in Martha’s life, helping her financially by providing work with a small wage, but also providing her with a bicycle and books to read. She, like the aunts, shows Martha how women can live independent lives. Martha begins to enjoy her independence and the life she has begun to build around herself with the help of the women in her life: “I had my books and my cleaning money and my bicycle and the two summer dresses my mother had made me” (Beckett 46). Martha’s improved lifestyle points toward the general improvement for women, as the war brought jobs in the aircraft building and elsewhere. Beckett, however, shows how Martha feels disassociated from the characters and setting in the books she reads:

My recollection of them is that they were all about village life in England during the war. They were like reading fairy stories, everything was in such order. There was the big house, the vicarage, the church, the doctor and the villagers. They all worked together in such unity I could only laugh. And of course they were every one Protestants. (Beckett 46)

Beckett describes these novels as housed in a library that has been set up in the home of a Protestant middle-class woman, who guards them as if they were her own property, which emphasises Martha's separation from the literature she was reading. As the war comes to an end, Martha suffers the complete loss of family with the death of her two aunts, and she finds herself dependent on the kindness of her neighbours who give her food, including bread. This gives her a template for her later life and shows how the women in her life enabled her to have the tools she needed to survive. Her aunts had left her their property in their will, allowing her financial independence and they are also the ones responsible for teaching her how to bake. The time she spent in the country during the war is therefore when she became a strong independent woman.

When Martha returns to the family home she finds it cold and empty, which represents the missing emotional centre of the family itself. She has not seen her father for almost six years and now her mother tells her he is in hospital with TB. Martha is shocked when she goes to visit him at how different he is from the picture she has in her head. He does not recognise her and his hand is "cold and dead", which is a physical embodiment of their relationship (Beckett 61). Earlier when Martha heard the local priest reading out the names of those who had recently been interred she mistook this word for Internment. This identifies the emotional impact of Internment as similar to bereavement. Martha feels her loss of her father like a death and she prays for him as she would for someone who has died; he has become, "a distant figure by then, vague with no weight" (Beckett 44). Martha's emotional response to her father's Internment as a death signifies the end of their relationship, and he dies shortly afterwards, having never recovered from the trauma of his imprisonment. The Internment of the father was the beginning of the destruction of Martha's childhood home and she, like her father, never recovers from this trauma. The war has robbed Martha of her father and her mother as their relationship was torn apart through the bombing and evacuation. Martha's mother, like her mother before her, expects her daughter to join with her in helping to finance the family home. She plans to set up a sewing business in the evenings, which she wants to expand as the price of cloth goes down, but she no longer knows her daughter who has been changed through her experiences in the country. Her brother Danny also has no relationship with his mother and is described as a broken young man who never recovers from his father's death. He dies young with a gun in his hand, carrying out IRA orders, and thus becomes another missing male body in the family home.

Martha's story is one of continual building, destruction, and re-building as she engages with the post-war aftermath and the changes in social identity. Paul Fussell in his work on the First World War suggests war produces a crisis of masculinity that allows for a reconstruction of gender, which he explores in his chapter "Soldier Boys" on warfare and sexuality. War propaganda however attempts to reclaim traditional patriarchal power structures and reinforce gender stereotypes by suggesting that women are behaving 'like men' by becoming workers in sacrifice to their 'natural' roles as mothers. Unfortunately, as Gill Plain argues, for women the creative space provided by the disruption of the patriarchal order, which allowed for a potential breaking down of masculine and feminine, was ultimately re-contained in an attempt to force traditional gender divisions and prevent any breakdown of patriarchal ordering: "Ultimately, and in spite of all the problems of articulation associated with the war, the only potential space that could offer any challenge to the homogeneity of masculine discourse was that of the text" (Plain 29). After the war Martha marries, and in the continuing traumatic rupturing of identity she is able to keep a potential space open outside the domestic, to rebuild her future as an equal alongside her husband who is no longer the dominant male representative of patriarchal power. She attempts to make a new life beyond the accepted domestic realm by breaking the taboo about work, to open a shop in her family home: literally bringing the public into the private space. Martha finds comfort in the community that springs up around her shop, which fills up with women on their way to and from work. This is a public and a private space because it is both a home and a shop, and Martha is both a neighbour and a shopkeeper. In this way Martha and the women workers have broken down the dividing line between women and home, between domestic and work and between public and private. In this way Martha's story continues the breaking down of the division between masculine and feminine, and public and private that began during the war.

Martha was able to open her shop because her mother and her aunts provided the funding and she is only able to continue to run her shop because of her mainly female customers. It provides a nurturing and practical space for women to support one another and stands against the violence of the streets. Megan Sullivan performs a Marxist reading of Beckett's *Give Them Stones*, which takes into account her colonial location, to suggest the story reveals, "Martha's move from a nationalist identity to a gender-based class politics" (Sullivan 227). She considers how Martha realises that she has

become commodified by the nationalists who have turned their community into objects of exchange. Sullivan illustrates this point by suggesting that her workplace was destroyed because she wished to be defined as a female wage earner and not a nationalist. However Sullivan fails to consider that Martha's action is less a rejection of the politics of her childhood and more a positioning of these political views as less important than caring for her family: "the thought of the border's like a nail sticking up in my shoe"; it remains an uncomfortable and painful part of her life (Beckett 118). The state, through the police and army questioning and intimidation, tries to define Martha's home-shop and body as belonging to the Republican movement (Beckett 126, 127). The equally patriarchal voice of the IRA similarly tries to lay claim to Martha's business and freedom of choice, and they destroy her shelter and means of employment when she refuses to comply (Beckett 144). In both situations the dominant patriarchs threaten what they see as the subversive female, who had created a space beyond their boundaries in which to achieve her own goals. Martha's attempts to defend her right to her own decisions, her own finances and her own space are overthrown when the IRA exert their dominance through violent actions. First, by showing their power over the younger generation by knee-capping the boy against the wall of her house and then by burning down her home-business in an action that mimics the traumas done to the Catholic population by the Protestant mobs.

Sullivan points to the use of the young boy's body to control Martha: "The boy's body *stands in* for Martha's bakery, and Martha the worker and business owner is aligned with a 'transgressive youth'" (Sullivan 233). Sullivan suggests that both Martha and the boy's bodies are used by the IRA as productive; the boy's body serves as an example of what happens when their laws are transgressed and Martha's body is useful for her economic production. However Sullivan ignores the role played by trauma in Martha's reading of the victimised bodies. Sullivan suggests that Internment led to Martha's rejection of nationalism and drove her into work to provide for her family, but what Sullivan neglects to note is that Martha enjoys being financially independent. It was not the lack of support that was the problem of Internment, but the trauma of the event itself which is important in this story: the forcible removing of a family member in the middle of the night by armed men who had full power to imprison whomever they chose for as long as they chose. The feeling of powerlessness and the fear of the unknown are the hidden trauma of this narrative. Like Mary, Martha has a missing body in her life, the body of her father, and the shock of knowing that it was the state who, although

supposed to protect their citizens, had acted against her family, branding them criminals and taking away their freedoms. The betrayal Martha felt that day was to stay with her and infiltrate her subsequent decisions. She takes back her freedom of choice by standing against both state and paramilitary authority, making her opinions heard and voicing her right to individual freedom.

Give Them Stones describes Martha's pride when the women stand against the army to bring sustenance to the besieged houses opposite. Beckett use of the verb "marched" emphasises how the women act like "a whole army" advancing on the enemy with only "bread and milk" in their hands (Beckett 121). This echoes the title of her novel, which is taken from Nathaneal West's *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933), the fuller quotation of which is given just before the beginning of the first chapter and is repeated by her uncle as a defence of his socialist beliefs: "When they ask for bread don't give them crackers as does the Church, and don't, like the state, tell them to eat cake. Explain that man cannot live by bread alone and give them stones" (Beckett 15). In her Donna Perry interview Beckett, on being asked why she chose that title and quotation suggests: "I thought that terrible cynicism and bitterness fits in so beautifully with those out-of-work men sitting in Belfast - that they'd realise they're not the only people in the world in this pitiable state" (Perry 71). She expands upon this in a later interview when she notes that religion was not important in Martha's life, but that she had wanted to have a reference to bread in the title (Sullivan 12). The implication is that Martha, like the women she watched earlier, will march forward against the powerful oppressor to give practical support and food to those in need. However, the actual title of the novel undercuts this message by suggesting that, in opposition to the moral principle, there is a call to "give them stones", which taken in the context of the setting, may also be a call to arms. Martha had tried the peaceful pathway, providing bread for her community, until the time came when she was no longer able to do so. Neither the army nor the paramilitaries would allow her to make her stand as she saw fit, so with no means left to provide bread, all Martha has left is the rubble and stones of her ruined home. She has a choice, to re-build from the foundation, or to use her stones to fight, as many people did, in protest at the continued presence of a colonial army in her community. However the most likely explanation for this peculiar exchange of bread and stones is that it is an ironic pun on the quotation attributed to Marie Antoinette toward her starving subjects, "let them eat cake", as the quotation refers to her uncle's republican and socialist principles. Martha is suggesting that the state in this case has not even offered cake but

stones to their citizens who are literally starving. The link between stones, the state and bread is made in Martha's acknowledgement that the politicians had taken financial aid from the poorest people, leaving them nothing to eat, and she was forced to give away her bread rather than to see them starve: "The Stormont people decided that they'd take the rents out of the dole or children's allowances or whatever they could get at and some people were really hungry. I had to give out bread free, time and again" (Beckett 130). This was a reference to the protest that was made against Internment, when women left without their husband's wages, went on strike by withholding their rent and rates. The "stones" of their houses were reclaimed back by the government by taking away their aid and thus their means of buying bread for their children; the politicians quite literally gave them stones instead of bread.

Elmer Kennedy-Andrews notes how Martha has been brought up with the two competing ideologies of her uncle Jimmy's traditional Nationalism and her uncle Joe's socialism (Kennedy-Andrews 244). The two uncles have a row about the General Strike, one defending it as the need for "workers" to unite together and the other attacking how "Englishmen" created hardships for those already living in poverty (Beckett 15-16). In many respects, rather than pitting socialism against nationalism, these two political views epitomise the competing issues within nationalism at that time. Nationalism was multi-stranded, but fell into the two key areas of traditional republicanism and left-wing republicanism. The influence of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, with its emphasis on cross-community unity, deepened this rift as the traditional republicans did not see a way of uniting unionist beliefs with their demands for a united Ireland, while the socialist republicans saw equality as a more pressing need than the freedom fight against British power. Martha is the next generation of nationalism that must choose its political influences from these two strands and, although she feels nostalgia for the stories of Irish rebels, she clearly shows her political allegiance is with left-wing nationalism. However, Martha complicates her politics by suggesting that the Civil Rights marches are naive in their dreams of freedom and equality and by her stand against her local IRA members. This does not negate her nationalist beliefs, but puts them in perspective beside her knowledge of past successes and failures, and also shows her strong belief in standing against violence. Martha's wish is to see equality and freedom for women and this is stronger than her nationalist beliefs. This is in direct opposition to the problems faced by organised feminist groups and individuals alike who were being pressurised to put their fight for

women's equality to one side in order to support the Republican movement.²³ Women like Martha were working quietly within their communities throughout this difficult period to bring support and practical help where it was needed. Beckett's portrayal of Martha is therefore bringing an important part of history into the public domain.

When Martha chooses to take a stand against complicity with the violence of the knee-capping, she knows there will be consequences and she waits for her body to be next to be attacked; she waits in fear of death. She feels isolated, abandoned and alone, which echoes her earlier emotions following the loss of her father, which was a trauma in Martha's life that affected all her subsequent relationships. The trauma repeats itself when she is left once again without a home or a family. When the IRA burn Martha out of her home she relives the trauma with the same emotions she felt when her mother took her to the country during the war: "I was the same again as I had been in my teens in the country - deserted. I did the same things as I had done then. I cleaned the house, I baked, I did the messages" (Beckett 147). Martha sinks into self-pity and depression, thinking she has no worth now that she is no longer able to go by her identity as a bread-maker: "If I am not baking bread I am nobody and nothing" (Beckett 147). Gerry Smyth sees Martha as using her role of bread-maker as a "defence against the erosion of her sense of self" (Smyth 136). It becomes her definition and her passion, her place of acceptance and a space free from trauma, judgement and trouble:

In essence, what Martha is (successfully) striving for is a room of her own – that is, a space in which she can interrogate and challenge through self-expression the discourses into which she has been born and which constitute the limits of her identity. (Smyth 136)

While she is creating and feeding both family and community, she is giving herself a role and a space to be defined beyond those assigned to her by her gender, race and class. Making bread becomes a real and metaphorical necessity for Martha, creating jobs, feeding the hungry and improving the quality of life within the community. Martha creates for herself a role within the community, which allows her to mix with the other women on a daily basis: to have a purpose in life that feeds others, even those who cannot pay. Martha refuses to accept the narrow options offered to her by a closed society based on the patriarchal premises that a woman is merely there to serve her husband and her children. The bread shop within her home is her form of rebellion

²³ The Women's Movement in Northern Ireland, like the Civil rights, was cross-community, but the strong diversity of political beliefs split the group apart and weakened the equality struggle for many years.

against the labelling of domestic female. She cannot fight her husband's right over her body, nor her domestic duties, and she does not wish to sell her body to the mill for wages. Instead she creates a space within these confines to define herself as an independent worker.

Kennedy-Andrews sees Martha, not in terms of her feminist principles, but as defined by her republicanism. He describes her as "a symbol of the free, indomitable human spirit" and notes that when her home-shop is destroyed, it is her husband and Sinn Fein who will fund her new home and shop: "Martha realises the material benefits of solidarity with an organised political party. Similarly, she comes to consider the potential of marriage as a business partnership" (Kennedy-Andrews 246). However the compensation was not from Sinn Fein, but was part of state-funded help for victims of violence and intimidation: Sinn Fein helped her husband fill out the forms, but the actual money was from the British government. When Martha learns about the compensation she laughs, because of the irony involved in the political wing of the nationalists encouraging her husband to ask for money from the British government for an act committed by the IRA as part of their anti-British campaign. Martha is not therefore financially obligated towards Sinn Fein; indeed, when she considers opening a new shop she asks one of the other shopkeepers how safe it is in terms of paying protection money, thereby noting how she will expect to be subjected to the same intimidation as before from the IRA: "How long would it be before it was burnt out too unless I subscribed when I was asked?" (Beckett 150) This is the opposite to Kennedy-Andrews' suggestion of support from the Republicans as it shows she will be expected once again to financially support them. In addition, although she rekindles a closeness to her husband she tells him that things will be different in their new house as it "is for both of us [...] it's not your mother's house now" (Beckett 151). Martha wants a new start on her terms, as an equal in their marriage, and in this new space she can feel an equal partner rather than the servant his mother used to make of her.

This is a very different understanding to Kennedy-Andrews' criticism of Martha for her rejection of her husband's kindness. He calls her "priggish" and "coldly detached" and quotes the scene where Dermot looked "down at me with the same fondness that he used for his mother" as evidence of her rejection of a "perennially good-natured man" (Kennedy-Andrews 247). However Kennedy-Andrews neglects to consider that Martha was not rejecting Dermot, but the *way* that he was looking at her as if she was his

mother. The male gaze here signifies the objectification not of desire but of the female body as commodity. His mother had served his need to be nurtured, fed and looked after. Dermot was putting Martha in the same position, expecting her to serve his needs; his look had projected a role upon her that she did not wish to take upon herself. Martha wished to be seen outside the patriarchal identification of women as enablers for their men-folk and instead wished to be accepted as an equal. Kennedy-Andrews neglects to see the imbalance in their relationship when it is based on the traditional patriarchy. In her early married years Martha had no financial independence and was subject to her mother-in-law's rules and Dermot's acts of kindness. This was not an equal partnership and Martha lived in fear of becoming pregnant once more. In a social and religious system which accepts male dominance, the wife has little freedom, so Martha has to find ways around the mores to gain independence. What we see at the end of the novel is a re-balancing of power as Martha, now freed from the worries of childcare and pregnancy, and financially empowered, is able to enjoy her marriage as a partnership of equals.

Both Sullivan and Kennedy-Andrews suggest Martha moves away from nationalist politics after her home and shop are burnt out, and that the ending suggests a positive move toward a happy future with her husband. However none of these interpretations acknowledges the potential of the ending of this novel. It may well have a single narrator but Martha's tone and the narrative style suggest inclusion as she describes her acknowledgement of the need for social change: she will accept change if it comes in the form of non-violent socialism. Her husband represents all the various patriarchal power bases, and Martha accepts him back in her life, thus acknowledging that he also has a right to be part of her future. He becomes at this point not a dominant male but her equal, deprived of his place of birth, without a job, and willing to be part of whatever they build together. Kennedy-Andrews suggests that Martha's comment "maybe I don't always face the truth about myself either" is a moment of self doubt that is not fully explored in a novel he describes as "lacking any self-interrogating, self-reflexive dimension" (Kennedy-Andrews 247). I would suggest however that Martha is showing a willingness and openness toward the future which is important for any re-building after a traumatic event. Martha has not so much changed her mind, as opened her mind to the possibility of a new reading of events and people. What she is admitting in the end is the need to be inclusive of her husband in her working environment, which would imply that she is willing to expand her ideology to include others, and not that she will

be brought back within the scope of patriarchal definitions. Most important however when considering the ending of the novel, is to include the part played by the historical traumas and their continuing influence over Martha's life and her fear and hopes for the future.

The historical traumas suffered by Martha's family and community are represented by Cavehill, which is an important site of traumatic memory within the novel. This black hillside is a dominating present in the background of the narrative, in much the same way as in real life it physically dominates most of the areas in Belfast where the novel is set. Beckett's first introduction of it as a place connected to Wolfe Tone and the Easter Rising gives it a distinct connection to a traumatic period in Irish history:

The Nose was really called MacArt's Fort, my father used to tell us and it was like all forts; it was a place with a great view that could let people long, long ago see for miles if an enemy or invader was coming and be safe unless the enemy managed to climb up and if they tried they were beaten off. Not so long ago Wolfe Tone had addressed a meeting of United Irishmen up there and told them Ireland was going to be free. (Beckett 17)

Martha remembers specific walks up the hills and she thinks of how her father's story about freeing Ireland contrasted to the poverty of the streets they lived in: "It was as if we were all in prison looking down at a beautiful world we'd never walk free in" (Beckett 18). Several of the stories connect the hillside to dead bodies, as for example the decaying smell inside one of the caves and the man lying down by the lake, which Mary Brigid assumes is a dead body (Beckett 17, 18). During an Easter daytrip the police are a heavy presence because of the fear of a Republican meeting in the hills associated with Wolfe Tone on the anniversary of the Uprising. The sisters are afraid that they will get into trouble with the police, who see them as a threat rather than looking to help the young girls. Cavehill and the stories of Tone are associated with Martha's father and her memories of her childhood, and the landscape is associated with the ancient history of Ireland, thus suggesting that the hills have been there long before the people: "The big houses were planted on the tops of round hills with a view right down the valleys harking back to our ancestors on the Cave Hill" (Beckett 103). Beckett's deliberate use of terms such as "big house" and "planted" shows the division between the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and Scottish planters, and the native Irish, which Martha considers as her "ancestry". Beckett may be referring to the O'Neill clan who famously had a crowning stone or throne on the hill, where they would name the next

king of Ireland. These associations all suggest Cavehill as an important site of traumatic historical collective memories.

Cavehill continues to cause problems in Martha's working life too. When she first visits Dermot's house she tells his mother that the mountains appear to be closer than they are from her own house's perspective. This suggests the impending Troubles that will see the historical problems erupt into violence once more. The year she opens her shop in the new extension, there are floods which destroy her bags of flour and are made worse by the water washed down from the mountains. Neither she nor the local shop owners are able to get financial or practical assistance from the local authorities, which they see as unlikely to change while they are being run by unionists. Despite the early happy association with her father, Cavehill is now shown to be connected to division, fear and loss. It has become a site of traumatic historical memory that looms over Martha and her family's life and signals the changes in the political atmosphere. When the Troubles begin in the late 1960s Martha turns again to the image of Cavehill as a bad omen for the future: "I had the constant feeling that Stormont was on the edge of the cliff on Cave Hill and something would topple it over" (Beckett 118). While she lives in the shadow of the mountain she is blighted by the past. At the end of the novel, although Martha looks forward to a future beyond her personal and collective trauma, the mountains remain as a negative presence in the background: "The day we moved into our new house was cold with a wind sweeping down from Cave Hill" (Beckett 151). The house has a fire with a back boiler to heat the radiators, which suggests the modern conveniences that will bring comfort and warmth into their home and thus signals a hope for the couple's future, but the mountains in the distance imply there are no expectations for a peaceful future away from the influence of the traumatic past.

Conclusion

Beckett's work is a retrospective attempt to utilise or eschew traditional public images of war in order to articulate how a Catholic woman can re-define her sense of self in a positive fashion in the traumatically disrupted aftermath of war. She represents this period of re-building as the breaking of previous identity markers to create a positive space of potential gender equality. Martha's strength and determination in *Give Them Stones* and Mary's first person narrative in "A Belfast Woman" prove to be voices absent from many previous stories of the Troubles. Beckett pioneers the strong female

anti-war voice as she describes women in their homes, on the streets, with their family and each other, dealing with religion and politics and economic difficulties. Beckett points to the repetitive nature of trauma, which recurs in future generations. When the traumas involve the loss of home, this is an added area for concern as it links to the loss of the familiar and the fracturing of the past self from the present day identity. Beckett considers the traumas of the past as an undiagnosed illness or unhealed scars, which re-emerges in patterns that are repeated in future generations. Like Cavehill, the division and trauma of the Partition remains as a shadow over the Belfast communities.

“Whatever you say, say nothing” is the mantra of many Northern Irish people, for the whole truth may be too much to bear. The culture of keeping quiet however, although it may maintain a functioning society, also creates a high level of avoidance and denial, which leads to a displacement of the past and a rejection of the trauma. The traumatic events of the Second World War are, as Plain suggests, not an easy event to represent:

There is, then, in all war writing and recollections of war experience, a story that cannot be told – something that will not ‘make sense’. [...] It is the unbearable and inarticulate ‘reality’ of war ever present behind the fictions of literature and of day-to-day existence. (Plain 20)

The ‘reality’ of war is multiple as Beckett demonstrates by the return of collective traumas from the past into the present day Troubles. Traumatic lives are not easily repeated in straightforward realist narratives, but a version of the truth can be laid down. We need to read between the lines to gain a deeper understanding of this time.

Chapter Three: Linda Anderson Exploring War and Gender in the 1970s and 1980s.

Linda Anderson: An Introduction to the Author

Linda Anderson was born into a working-class Protestant family in Belfast in 1949. The third of five children, she felt herself set apart from her peers because of her Canadian mother and her close friendship with a Catholic girl who helped her to realise the ambiguity and bigotry of the opposing views on Irish history and politics taught at their different schools. Anderson studied French and Philosophy at Queen's University, Belfast, before completing a postgraduate diploma in teaching. During her time at university Anderson became involved in the Human Rights campaign and took part in the 1968 Civil Rights marches, which allowed her to witness first hand the violence and police aggression against the students and other civilians. On concluding her studies, Anderson moved to England in search of work and settled in London where she tried several jobs, including teaching at a comprehensive school, before moving on to creative writing tutoring at a number of universities including Nottingham Trent and Goldsmiths' College. Anderson taught for eight years at Lancaster University where she was appointed Head of Creative Writing before becoming a Reader in Creative Writing at The Open University in 2002. Anderson is now Chair of Creative Writing at the Open University. In addition to her fiction writing, she has written chapters on creative writing for *Wordsmithery: The Writer's Craft and Practice* (2006), and *A Creative Writing Handbook: Developing Dramatic Technique, Individual Style and Voice* (2009), has produced her own creative handbook *Creative Writing: A Workbook with Readings* (2006), and has co-written *Writing Fiction* (2008).

Anderson's fiction has been published in America and Australia as well as Britain and Ireland. She began as a poet and short story writer, but went on to write two novels before beginning her career writing plays for stage and radio. Anderson's play *Charmed Lives* (1988) won the London Writers' Competition and during her time as a Director for BBC Radio Drama she won the "Write Out Loud" Award for her Radio writing in 1997. She has also received the 1990 Testimony Award from the Sunday Playhouse, and Radio Four's Bedtime Book Award in 1992. Anderson stories have been included in creative writing journals and magazines such as *Cyphers*, *Iron*, *Symbolic Interaction*

and *Mslexia* and, although she has yet to produce a collection of her poetry, her poetry has included in anthologies such as *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing V* (2002), *Women on War* (1988), and *Pillars of the House* (1987). Her short stories are also represented in anthologies as, for example, “The Death of Men” in Michael Parker’s *The Hurt World: Short Stories of the Troubles* (1995) and “The Marvellous Boy” in Lizz Murphy’s *Wee Girls: Women Writing from an Irish Perspective* (1996). Anderson’s story “Blinding” which is included in Ailbhe Smyth’s *Wildish Things* was turned into a sound production to accompany paintings by Margaret Bailey Doogan in Stern Gallery Tucson (1990) and later into a play for Belfast Arts Festival at Queen’s University. Anderson published a collection of ten of her short stories in *The Nurse’s Wife and Other Stories* (2004), which enables easier access to her work for an overview of her story writing.

Anderson’s first novel *To Stay Alive* (1984), which was simultaneously published in America as *We Can’t All Be Heroes, You Know*, has been well received by critics and reviewers from both countries. *To Stay Alive* won the Arts Council Award and was shortlisted for the David Higham Prize and the Sinclair Prize for Fiction. *Cuckoo* (1986), which was re-printed in Ireland in 1988 by Brandon Books, has received mixed reviews due to its more experimental style. There are surprisingly few critical engagements with Anderson’s writing and sadly her novels remain out of print despite their significance in representing an important voice within Northern Irish literature. *To Stay Alive* has recently begun, despite its out-of-print status, to receive more attention in anthologies and critical analyses of Northern Irish literature. Rebecca Pelan in *Two Irelands: Literary Feminisms North and South* (2005) describes *To Stay Alive* as “a dark and fatalistic representation of Northern Ireland’s political present and future”, which she suggests is representative of the Protestant position as its key protagonists are from that background (Pelan 93). Phelan balances this by noting that Anderson’s second novel, although also written from a Protestant’s perspective, is a distinct rejection of Unionist ideology and therefore both these novels are significant in their unique representations of Protestant women. In his “Introduction” to *The Hurt World* Parker also raises the importance of Anderson’s writing for representing the Protestant voice when he describes her story “The Death of Men” as an “acerbic portrait of male-reverencing bourgeois Protestantism” (Parker 3). With this in mind, it is regrettable that studies which look at contemporary representations of Northern Ireland do not include Anderson as, for example, Laura Pelashiar’s *Writing the North: The Contemporary*

Novel in Northern Ireland (1998) or Barry Sloan's *Writers and Protestantism in the North of Ireland* (2000). In writing, as in political representation, the Northern Irish Protestant woman is an almost invisible figure.

One critic who has noted the importance of Anderson's writing is Linden Peach who includes readings of *To Stay Alive* (along with six other Irish authors, one of whom is Jennifer Johnston) in his *Contemporary Irish and Welsh Women's Fiction: Gender, Desire and Power* (2007). Similarly he also reads Johnston and Anderson together in chapter three "Secret Hauntings" in *The Contemporary Irish Novel: Critical Readings* (2004). Peach considers how novels written in the 1980s and 1990s were beginning to include more marginalised voices and he considers how Anderson's *To Stay Alive* is an example of the need for secret identities as a way of hiding differences (Peach 13). In addition Clair Wills has included Anderson's "Blinding" in her section on "Contemporary Writing, 1960-2001" in Volume V of *The Field Day Anthology: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions* (2002). Wills notes that she has taken this story from Smyth's *Wildish Things* which highlights the significance of several of the phrases from the story in the "Introduction". Smyth calls for the silent voices of the women in Irish literature to be allowed to be heard and she uses a quotation from Anderson's story to illustrate her point: "Every woman is an outlaw, guarding her secrets. Mumbling her riddles at your strong walls" (Anderson: Smyth 11). Smyth off-sets this rather negative imagery of male dominance with a further quotation where Anderson acknowledges that "the future can always be rewritten", which Smyth considers the job of women writers in their quest for representation (Anderson: Smyth 15). This use of Anderson's writing highlights her themes and style. In her short introduction to "Blinding" Wills considers Anderson's writing, not just as it is represented within this story, but in more general terms:

In Linda Anderson's novels and short stories the personal, social and political are inextricably linked. Her feminist perspective is served by a playful self-conscious use of language delivered with passionate force. (Wills: Bourke et al 1186)

Anderson proves to be a feminist writer breaking down the boundaries between the public and private and exploring gender differences within her character's experiences, while remaining very much as she herself has stated, a Northern Irish writer who has

attempted to explore a specific space and time using innovative techniques to convey complex issues.²⁴

Introduction to the Chapter

Linda Anderson explores identity markers such as gender and nationality and traces how these are affected by trauma in her two novels, *To Stay Alive* (1984) and *Cuckoo* (1986) and in her short stories from the 1970s to the 1980s, which are collected together and published in *The Nurse's Wife and Other Stories* (2004). These stories return to themes, repeating characters, plotlines and concepts that suggest the repetitive nature of trauma. Anderson's novel *Cuckoo* is significant as it takes the reader out of the insular world of Northern Ireland politics to engage with the ways in which world politics were influencing, and indeed part of the Troubles. Anderson uses the space created by trauma to refuse the patriarchal hierarchy of language and imagery, while also posing for the reader important questions about the female body and identity. She engages with the female body on multiple levels as it is positioned during war, often by considering it as a commodity or a weapon within western patriarchy. Anderson explores feminist theories to highlight the need for women to write their own stories, take control of their bodies and create a positive projection of the concept of woman. She focuses on how words, images and symbols can become weapons against women, utilised to create a perception of gender that imprisons both sexes. Through her explorations of trauma and gender, Anderson actively seeks forms that encourage open readings of the past. She has suggested that her background has influenced her writing processes and there is a quasi-autobiographical aspect to her work as the protagonists in both her novels display a slippage of identity markers, which is a key theme within her writing.

Anderson's texts strive to break down divisions, exposing the bones behind ideology and acknowledging the repetitious behavioural patterns of trauma. Her revisiting of key themes throughout her writing is in itself an expression of trauma. Her collection of short stories contains many of the themes of her novels: death, decay, grief, funerals, bodies, sickness, relationship breakdowns, family problems, and coping with trauma, the writing and reading processes, birth, abortion, and the destructive nature of war. Anderson's writing suggests that the dead play too great a part in the present, and

²⁴ Anderson described this to me in personal emails. It can be referenced using a quotation from the entry I have written on Linda Anderson for Gonzalez's *Irish Women Writers: An A-to-Z Guide* (2006): 9.

attention is given to the role of the body to show how it is the primary site for interaction with the past. In *To Stay Alive*, which is set mainly in the young couple's home and surrounding Belfast streets, Anderson depicts how the claustrophobic atmosphere is a form of imprisonment from where the protagonist longs to fly away like a bird.²⁵ The entire area becomes a site of traumatic memories from which there is no relief and relationships are viewed through the lens of violent history. Many of the themes Anderson advances in this novel are revisited in the short stories that are haunted by references to trauma and death, and in her second novel *Cuckoo* (1986), which depicts the devastating psychological impact of a sectarian killing on a young woman who finds herself repeating patterns of behaviour which revisit her trauma. Anderson therefore demonstrates the pattern of repetition within her writing as the interweaving of themes and incidents from her short stories throughout her novels. *Cuckoo* in particular has at the centre of the novel echoes of the return of repressed trauma. By reading the appropriate stories alongside the novel it is possible to explore her contrasting depictions of trauma and how these interact with her discussions of gender.

Anderson's Early Writing

The interplay of theoretical explorations of gender, sexuality, nationality, trauma and death is repeated in many forms throughout Anderson's writing. She describes Belfast men in a similar way to Beckett's missing bodies, thus suggesting that loss is a prominent feature in Belfast, and provides a framework that connects loss to trauma. This is described in a variety of ways in Anderson's writings and death is not the only bodily absence: "Like all the men round here. You lose them to the prison or the pub, one or the other" (Anderson, *To Stay Alive* 68). Anderson engages with death by exploring issues of knowing, seeing and understanding trauma as it is complicated when considering the extent to which it is possible to understand another's trauma. Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience* suggests that the experience of death can become overlaid with, "not knowing the difference between life and death" (Caruth 37). Anderson's characters are depicted as caught in the moment of death and the gap in knowing. The absent body of the dead features significantly for all the characters who have been changed by trauma. It is at the fore in the opening scene in her first novel *To Stay Alive* when Dan considers how Belfast has become a "necropolis" filled with death

²⁵ Simultaneously published in 1984 in New York under the title *We Can't All Be Heroes, You Know*

(Anderson 7). *To Stay Alive* is set in 1979 and forms an unusual take on the ‘across the barricades’ genre, which is associated with Joan Lingard’s novels about a Protestant girl called Sadie and her Catholic boyfriend Kevin during the Troubles. It deals overtly with the horrors of the worst areas of the Troubles and emphasises the inescapability from fear, grief and violence. The trauma at the heart of this novel is symbolised in the death of the family dog Lily, whose carcass is discovered covered in wounds on a patch of barren grass close to Dan and Rosaleen’s home. When they go to bury the body it has disappeared, thus prioritising the missing bodies in the novel. The couple do not know how or why the dog was killed, nor how or why her body has been removed.

The symbol of the missing body of the dog represents the not-knowing of Aidan’s death for Rosaleen and the not-knowing of Des’ death for Gerry, the young British soldier stationed in Belfast. Neither body can be viewed as the wounds were too severe and the coffins remain closed. As Caruth suggests, it is the gap in the knowing of death that bears the impact of the trauma. The official records state that Des accidentally shot himself with his own rifle, but Gerry his close friend, suspects it was suicide because of Des’ unusual behaviour. He will never know for certain how or why Des died. In a similar situation Rosaleen revisits the moment of the murder of her friend Aidan as she struggles to know why and how he died:

But she could not stop thinking about it, Aidan’s face always in her inside self, no matter what she did. Did he know he was dying? Did he think of what he loved, of his past, or was everything crowded out by that dying? If he lost consciousness, when they were torturing him, was his death real, or did his death not exist until people discovered him and said: ‘He is dead.’
Aidan died and she would die. (Anderson 32)

Rosaleen was not present for the death and she does not believe the reason she has been given as to why he was killed. She has been told that Aidan was killed for being a “tout” but she, who knew him from her early childhood, does not believe he could be an informer. Rosaleen feels disconnected from her own body through the trauma of Aidan’s missing murdered body. This is illustrated in a scene where she meets Gerry in the graveyard while she is looking at Aidan’s grave and appears disconnected from her body as he has sexual intercourse with her. She connects sex with death as she begins to experience the trauma within her body: ““Oh no, no, this body is mine. Am I doing something? Am I?” Her eyes stayed open and it was the same day and the same place, but with every thrust inside her she was getting back and back to... What” (Anderson

41). Her body imitates Aidan's dead body in its lack of connection to a physical living self. This is Rosaleen's attempt to connect the reality of the dead body to her living body and to acknowledge the trauma of the missing body. Caruth highlights how the body can become a site of trauma, a living tomb to express grief and allegiance: "the faithful monument to a death" (Caruth 31). It is only through her emergence into such a state that Rosaleen is able to embody the trauma, to permeate it into her being, and re-emerge with a new form of seeing and knowing. The process of absorbing the trauma becomes a process of forgetting; forgetting to hate, forgetting madness, forgetting the past: "the forgetting that began her sane seeing and knowing, [is] a freedom that is fundamentally a betrayal of the past" (Caruth 33). This betrayal is sited primarily in the body as it tries to witness to the trauma. Anderson repeats this exploration of witnessing, not knowing and embodying loss in *Cuckoo* where she returns to consider the trauma of dead and missing bodies.

One key theme in Anderson's writing is how trauma raises questions concerning the role of witnessing and in this space she often creates a connection between the Troubles and other wars. A dialogue in *To Stay Alive* between two soldiers based in an army camp in Belfast demonstrates the link between the trauma of the Northern Irish Troubles and the war traumas from the Holocaust and the bombing of Hiroshima:

Listen. The killers made death not count. Extermination in bulk. They made it anonymous. Nothing belonging to those Jews and they belonged to no one. It's as if they never were.

[...]

There are light bulb factories in Hiroshima now. Light out of darkness. Commerce rules...It'll be the same after this stupid fight. I don't want to be here any more. (Anderson 81)

In this quotation the soldier, Gerry is becoming aware that he is being trained to see the Northern Irish communities as a homogenous entity rather than individual humans, which is something he can no longer do now that he has begun a personal relationship with Rosaleen. He considers how killing is only possible by de-humanising individuals and the extremes that this can reach. The trauma of mass extermination in the Holocaust and Hiroshima are linked in his mind to the multiple deaths he is witnessing and he can no longer be part of a system involving organised violence and murders. Both parts of this quotation end with the thought that, after the traumas it is as if they had not happened, which is not referring to the factual happening, but to the ability after trauma of assimilating the actuality of the happening into individual or national consciousness:

the reality of the trauma, the completeness of the horror of death and de-humanisation that occurred is “never there”, because it can never be fully known. To an extent by allowing life to continue after the event there must be a certain amount of acceptance and suppression, but Gerry is unable to allow for that to happen with his experiences. He does not want to fully comprehend what he has witnessed and be asked to continue with his life as if it had never happened. The traumas he has witnessed have changed Gerry and he has to find a new way forward that will give him space to accommodate his traumatic experiences.

Anderson explores the connection of death with the gendered image of Ireland through Rosaleen who is described by Gerry as “Darkness. The dark Rosaleen. Dark girl” in response to a comment by a Protestant woman who uses the word “darkness” to describe Catholics (Anderson 28). This is an anti-Catholic comment on both parts, which brings the gendering of Ireland into focus. “The Dark Rosaleen” is a poem by James Clarence Mangan and is a well-known nationalist song that refers to Ireland as a woman.²⁶ The gendering of nationalism is in itself a conflation of sexuality with death as it creates the figurehead of the young virgin or old woman calling for her lover or son to die for her. The tradition of the Aisling or poetic feminised muse is long established within Irish literary traditions as the image of the call to war by the female, for the male sacrificial death. Yeats utilised many images of Ireland as a woman, including Mangan’s Dark Rosaleen, which he reproduced in *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902) his one act play co-written with Lady Gregory, where an old woman becomes young and beautiful through the blood of a young man who dies fighting for Irish freedom. Anderson deconstructs this traditional image within both her novels. In *Cuckoo*, Mother Ireland is a sick and abandoned old woman: “Tangled hair. Watery, beseeching eyes. Shawl draped round her shoulders and fastened with a safety pin” (Anderson 7). Anderson deconstructs expectations of this image of Mother Ireland, by suggesting its traditional meaning is a lie: “You mustn’t believe anything you’ve heard about me [...] They’ve turned everyone against me. Lies, wicked lies” (Anderson 7). Fran feels haunted by her “like a pop-up monster in a children’s book” as her image continuously haunts her thoughts, whispering in her ear, and thus she appears to represent for Fran the embodiment of her traumas (Anderson 8). In *To Stay Alive* it is not the young Irish Rosaleen asking for young men to die for their country, but the British government.

²⁶ “My Dark Rosaleen” by James Clarence Mangan was written during the famine and can be found at *The Poetry Foundation* <<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/180696>>

Rosaleen is instead the mother-figure trying to find a way to keep her child alive in what is clearly described as a war zone. She considers the way that flesh has become cheapened within a system that uses bodies as weapons:

All men are wrong who held bodies in cheap esteem. Pornographers. Politicians. Armies. Even priests.

Health of the soul does not depend on the mortification of the body.

Mortification. *Mors, mortis*. Death. Putting the flesh to death. 'No wonder we have such crooked penitent ways of loving each other!' she thought. She was never going to hate herself again because there were men who wanted to abuse her. (Anderson 186)

Mortification holds within its meaning the religious abstinence from sexual pleasure and the medical term for the decay or death of living flesh; therefore by declination, Anderson joins sexuality with death. Within the context of this novel this is both a social and a literary coding of the feminine. In this way Anderson works to deconstruct this coding and produce alternative views of the female, while acknowledging the connection of trauma and death to gender and sexuality through the overlapping of narrative power and issues of representation.

Anderson considers how national and gender identity interacts with the bodies of the dead by utilising the imagery of birds, which are linked in Irish traditions to both positive and negative tropes. Celtic mythology uses birds in several way, mainly as vessels that carry the souls of the dead, but also as messengers of death, or prophets of future harm. Birds are also associated with personification; the living are for example eternally turned into birds in the Children of Lir. The inclusion of birds in Irish literature often presupposes its connection with the female form as many of the myths associate women with birds, whether they take on their form or use them in their battles. The desire to be able to transform into a bird and fly away from troubles is repeated throughout Anderson's writing. In *To Stay Alive* Rosaleen sees a single swan on the black mill pond and considers how the bird is free to fly away at anytime whereas she is trapped in the dirty streets (Anderson 93). The image of the swan suggests a reference to Yeats who uses the swan in his poetry as an emblem of Ireland, and to the Children of Lir who are usually depicted as swans. An example of this is Sheila MacGill-Callahan's version of the story, where four children are turned into swans: "Swans you are and swans you shall remain for three hundred years, or until the Man from the North shall be joined to the Woman from the South" (MacGill-Callahan 6). In this version, as in many others the swans represent the four provinces of Ireland and is therefore a

reference to the nationalist desire for a united Ireland. Similarly Yeats in “The Wilde Swans at Coole” and “Leda and the Swan” turns to the image of the swan as a metaphor for Irish colonialism.²⁷ In “Leda and the Swan” Zeus turns himself into a swan before raping Leda who then gives birth to Helen of Troy. This is a metaphor of the British colonialism of Ireland, which led to the “birthing” of Northern Ireland, an image that is returned to in many different forms within Irish literature, including Heaney’s poem “Act of Union”. Anderson critiques this imagery in *Cuckoo* but here she references the swan as a way of pointing to how the traumatic history of Ireland exists within the current traumas her protagonist is facing in Belfast. The image of the swan on water is often utilised in Irish literature as a reference to Yeats’ “The Wilde Swans at Coole” and its signification of post-war trauma: he describes how seeing the swan brings him back to the swan of nineteen years earlier, which was before the First World War and the Irish Civil War, and how his world vision has changed. By re-producing this image on the “black mill pond” situated beside the rubble and the army base, Anderson connects the swan, not just to the protagonist’s desire for personal freedom beyond her current circumstances, but to political freedom from the British army, and how her experiences of trauma have changed how she views herself within the world: her world has been changed forever through her encounter with trauma. This image ends the chapter where Rosaleen has described the British soldier as being an “enemy” from “a foreign country” and how she was discriminated against because of her nationality (Anderson 91). In this particular bird reference therefore Anderson has connected the traumatic history of Irish wars with the present day Troubles.

Anderson introduces a different concept of birds towards the end of *To Stay Alive* by connecting the image of a bird to Rosaleen’s naked body:

She laid the child down and went over to the window in an odd rapt state, her palms placed beneath her breasts. A bird landed unsteadily on the ledge outside. ‘If Dan were here, he would name what sort of bird you are, explain all about your auditory system, mating habits, mating habits...’
A man passing by on the opposite side of the street caught sight of her and stopped in his tracks. He stared, mouth gaping. (Anderson 186)

Anderson’s description of Rosaleen in this scene re-creates the image of a Madonna and child, before she assumes a pose similar to the laying out of a dead body. Anderson considers in this chapter how women can be created negatively through the male

²⁷ Both poems can be found in Jeffares edition of Yeats’ poetry; “The Wilde Swans at Coole” (233) and “Leda and the Swan” (322).

encodement of the female body. Rosaleen has made a decision to reject both the guilt she feels imparted from her religion towards her sexual desires and any loyalty she has felt towards the IRA: “there was nothing to choose between armies. The Provisionals were well-named. Hadn’t they succeeded in making life even more provisional and uncertain than it need be” (Anderson 186). Rosaleen feels her body has become encoded or labelled in the same way as her husband would classify the bird. She however wants to re-define her body, but the man outside the window traps her in his objectification of her female body, and she becomes angry that she cannot express her body as she wishes without patriarchal signification. In the following chapter Rosaleen is once again under the male gaze when watched by Gerry from the safety of his gun-tower where he encodes her body as an object of desire that he wishes to possess. The bird on the window, when considered within this context, is associated not with freedom or forgiveness, but with entrapment. Rosaleen despite her desire for freedom, finds herself trapped within the patriarchal codings of religion and the politics of war, both having placed meanings on her body from which she cannot as yet find a means of escape. Anderson therefore does not present straightforward solutions to her engagement with gender and national identities in crisis.

The imagery of birds appears in several of Anderson’s short stories, both as a way of engaging with gendered identity and to consider the traumatised body. Birds are referenced in the final image of “Blinding” a story that is not in Anderson’s collection, but which has been anthologised in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Volume V Irish Women’s Writing and Traditions* (2002) and Ailbhe Smyth’s *Wildish Things: An Anthology of New Irish Women’s Writing* (1989). This five part story is divided into four parts entitled with the name of a martyr: Lucy, Jocasta, Peter, and Toshiko and a final unnamed section. The parts are linked by the women who are punished for their sexuality by religious men. The violence and mindlessness of these acts are underscored by the metaphor of the eye: “The pupil of the eye is a hole. A hole to trap light. A nothing that expands and contracts. Like a womb. A void. I stuck my pin into nothing” (Anderson: Smyth 116). This is a reference to Sartre’s existential theories, which Anderson returns to in both her novels to deconstruct negative imagery of female representations. The metaphor of blinding is taken up in the opening phrase where the narrator Lucy says, “I put my eyes out. Because I must be invisible. Out of your sight. Now you dare not see me. I am what you cannot countenance” (Anderson: Smyth 111). Jocasta and Oedipus continue the theme of sight in the second section while Peter, a

gravedigger who uses his tools to re-arrange the body parts of dead women, removes the eyes of his victims. Toshiko brings the concept of blinding into the twentieth century with the Hiroshima bombing, a war trauma which is opened up to be inclusive of other wars in which defenceless women and children were raped, tortured and killed: "There are light bulb factories in Hiroshima now. Light out of darkness. Commerce rules. . . . I watch and wait for the next Blinding. For our mind is set on slaughter" (Anderson: Smyth 117). In all of these sections, seeing becomes synonymous with witnessing and accountability. The final part of this story repeats Anderson's metaphor of the bird flying freely away from danger. The male sniper, who shivers in anticipation of killing the hawk he has in his "killing field of vision" is prevented from shooting the bird by the female voice: "The wild bird soars. Untargeted. Free" (Anderson: Smyth 118). The hawk is considered in Irish mythology as an ambiguous symbol because it is a prophetic bird that is linked to death and resurrection. It is also a descriptive term for a person who is pro-war, as apposed to the dove as a symbol of peace. In this story it could be seen as a messenger from the dead who have been discussed in the previous sections, and thus it is connected to the witnessing of trauma and war. Anderson, while acknowledging that it may be impossible to stop the "bird" of war, is pointing to the role of the witness to speak out against the death, destruction and trauma that is at the centre of all wars.

Anderson returns to the image of the bird in a further engagement with gender and national identity in the short story "Skin" which questions both how women's bodies can be represented and how political identity is ascribed through imagery. In this story an airplane is described as a mechanical bird, which is feminised through the trope of the womb: "Flight was a way of being out and in at the same time, neither here nor there, suspended and blameless in a levitating womb" (Anderson 38). When considered in this light the female form is a liminal space, which appears in this description to be simultaneously both positive and negative. This links to the main theme of this story, which connects the female body to the imprisoned male body. The story opens with the description of an actual newsreel footage of the release of Gerry Conlon, one of the Guildford Four who, on faulty evidence and an enforced confession had been given a 30 year life sentence in 1974 as a supposed IRA bomber. He is depicted by Martina, the narrator, as a hero in a "white shirt" flanked by his two sisters who appear as, "the angels she had imagined accompanying her throughout her childhood" (Anderson 37). The wings of these "angels" again connect the female body to flight. The relationship of

identity and nationality are under question in this story and Anderson draws upon the metaphor of the skin as a way of reading personal history: “*Did you know that the surface of the skin is dead cells? When you touch someone, you touch their history. We could rub the death off each other*” (italics in original, Anderson 40). Anderson is putting forward the suggestion that there may be some hidden trauma in the narrator’s life, which would complicate the issue of knowing her history as it is associated with death. Martina has been described as a somnolent, sleep-walking through her life as if “running away” (Anderson 46). Martina may be hoping that two people who have had an experience of trauma can gain a mutual understanding. This is an idea put forward by Caruth in her discussions of *Hiroshima Mon Amour*: “the film dramatises something that happens when two different experiences, absolutely alien to one another, are brought together” (Caruth 34). In this story Martina feels a kinship with prisoners, which turns out to be a false identification as she realises in the end that her identity as a woman makes her understanding of trauma very different to those of the male prisoners. This is a theme which Anderson will return to in her other work as she considers how women have been fetishised and abused, how representations of the female form can objectify and sexualise women, and ultimately how males and females may experience trauma in different ways because it is sited within their gendered bodies.

The dead are portrayed as flying away in “Waste” the final story in her collection, which sits as a summation of the other stories. The narrator is a nurse who, on discovering her elderly patient has a methodically categorised scrapbook of deaths, begins to talk about Northern Ireland, ending with a story about her great-grandmother nursing her son back to health only to have him killed within weeks at the Somme. When “Mother Time” dies shortly afterwards the nurse renames her dog Wolfie and takes him to the top of a hill. Anderson ends with the image of the white pages containing the stories of deaths floating away in the sky as if they are white birds flying away with the souls of the dead “flying away, far away from all gloating and grieving” (Anderson 109). Wolfie and Mother Time can be seen as tropes for Ireland and the freeing of the pages as a release from the cycle of violence and war. This story therefore revisits Anderson’s exploration of war and the need to end the cycle of war and death by letting go of the past, something which is also explored at the end of her two novels. In addition, by naming her second novel after the cuckoo, Anderson is highlighting her protagonist Fran’s national identity crisis, for she sees herself and her daughter as displaced from their home and any sense of history or culture. This will lead her to

question not only her political and cultural identification, but how she perceives herself as a woman. Anderson's use of the cuckoo as a symbol for Fran's daughter Emily denies any form of nationalist politics in the birthing metaphor; it is impossible to declare birthrights to a land that is not ancestral. In *Cuckoo* Anderson will return to many of the themes from her previous works, including the missing bodies of the dead, to further expand on how trauma breaks down national and gender identity markers.

Cuckoo

In *Cuckoo* Anderson's protagonist Fran is introduced as she is beginning a slow disintegration of her identity after she has experienced two traumatic life events. These traumas are linked to Fran's image of herself as a woman and also to her political identity. Fran's first traumatic encounter with death happened when she was a young teenager and her boyfriend Nick was killed by a paramilitary bomb, which made a mockery of his anti-political and anti-religious beliefs. Her husband Paul, whom she married shortly after Nick's death, tormented her, forced her to have an abortion, and then left her alone in England. Fran later discovers that Paul was suffering from guilt after a man was killed at work because Paul suggested he was an informer. These deaths and their influence on Fran are linked to the Troubles and challenge Fran's political and nationalist beliefs. In addition, because Fran was in a relationship with both these men it challenges her understanding of herself as a social being and as a woman. Fran describes how she changes from feeling unselfconscious about her sexuality and her body in the early stages of her relationship with Nick, towards a negative sense of her body as an object of male desire, fragmented from her sense of herself as a woman. Anderson depicts this breaking down through Fran's neglect of her body, which Fran begins to view through the eyes of the men who have misrepresented her. Anderson engages with the negativity of the male gaze in the rape scene at the beginning of the novel, which also raises questions about the representation of women's bodies in literature. The physical attack on her body echoes the attack on her fractured psyche, and the birth and nurturing of her baby echoes the separating out of her trauma and the re-building of the events that led to her breakdown.

Structure and style are integral to the meaning of *Cuckoo*, which unfolds a pattern of repetition forming in Fran's life as she revisits her emotional past. She repeats her traumas throughout her life until she is reduced to a catatonic state of mere physical

existence where she eventually encounters a way to re-engage with her suppressed traumas. Anderson's depiction of Fran's trauma resonates with Janet's theories on trauma as it highlights the important role of the body in experiencing the return of latent trauma. It is only by repeating her encounter with trauma that Fran can connect to and begin to understand her trauma. She describes her days as "foggy and neutral" and she slowly shuts down until she has retreated into a space where she either walks aimlessly and repeatedly through the same streets or sits quietly in her room imagining her "blood moving sluggish and muddy" (Anderson 11). She is focused on her body and is trying to access her fractured past through her body. She relives Paul's abuse of her body in repeated sexual encounters with men, until her experience with Cornelius. It is only by becoming pregnant for the second time that Fran is able to connect to the trauma of her enforced abortion, which had until that point remained as a latent trauma within her unconscious. By returning to relationships and experiences that re-live her traumas, Fran is able to actively engage with the past and acknowledge it as a destructive pattern of repetition within her life. Anderson however will continue to question the extent to which trauma can be understood or known beyond the bodily responses to the past and she shows throughout the novel how Fran continues to engage with her body as a way of focusing on her fractured identity. One of the ways she considers traumatic repetition and knowability is through her use of form.

De Beauvoir connects the story with its form to suggest that the "way of telling" is part of the story to such an extent that it is integral to its meaning (de Beauvoir 718). Claire Buck notes the connection between Anderson's "exploration of the impact of violence and conflict on people" and her style, "passionate and laconic, her writing is often boldly experimental and subversive" (Buck 279-280). This may help explain the fragmented form of Anderson's *Cuckoo* with its non-linear structure and the lengthy central chapter in the style of a diary entitled "Fran's Story" which moves back in time to Fran's Belfast childhood and later traumas. Within this chapter there is also a short section set out in the form of a play to describe a scene at a funeral. Dominic's reading of Fran's diary doubly distances the reader from Fran as it is a written version of her personal history, read through a character who has been shown as an unreliable interpreter. The missing section of Fran's past is the breakdown of her marriage, which is told only in part in the final chapter. There are also numerous chronological ellipses, and repetitions of events and Anderson chooses to replace sections of the narrative with short italicised and highly stylised parodies of the scene in question. These scenes are

frequently moments of pain, conflict and trauma. Anderson therefore uses her style and format to illustrate the incapacity of writing to tell the whole story and to engage with linguistic signification. Anderson, having demonstrated that she is aware of current literary theory, is displaying in her writing how words can influence the interpretation of events. She suggests for example, by repeating the particular stylised format of romantic fiction during the scene with Cornelius in the first chapter that such genres hide the true power structure between male and female. Thus the style of the novel parodies Anderson's engagement with the power of words, a key theme that runs throughout. The structuring of the novel also becomes a way of expressing the nature of trauma itself with gaps in the narrative and repeated returns to the sites of trauma.

Anderson also shows repetition in the novel by returning to themes and images connected to trauma and death. For example in the short story "The Marvellous Boy" Anderson references characters from *Wuthering Heights* by setting up a dichotomy between the two women, Ruth and Jenny who are described as Heathcliffe/Linton, "Anorectic or Adipose", "Dark Peril or Blonde Froth. Treachery or Treacle" and compares this to "an advertisement for different types of women" (Anderson 15,16). This is similar to the two protagonists in *Cuckoo*, Fran and Caroline. In both the novel and short story however what actually divides the two women is their experiences of trauma. Fran and Ruth are both closely aligned with death and trauma, whereas Caroline and Jenny, although having grieved over loved ones, have no experiences of traumatic deaths. The trauma of the death of her older brother and her feelings of guilt at surviving, resurface when Ruth watches the death of a premature baby and hears her father crying over the memory of the death of a young male student whom his police colleagues had shot dead:

Billy died. We both had diphtheria. He was fourteen. I was twelve. I was expected to go the same way. Keep the wreath, my aunt Miriam told her, you'll be needing it again soon. In front of me. I never told that to anyone. Billy died. I did not die. (Italics in original. Anderson 22)

The repetition of this trauma returns when Ruth and her father watch rioters in Belfast on the television: "The police fired plastic bullets at rioters. A young man was struck on the head. A televised death. They re-ran it in slow-motion" (Anderson 26). Both are shocked by the scene, Ruth weeps and Kelso "looked bewitched and dull as a sleepwalker" and recognise they fear the death of each other (Anderson 27). Life is not

safe and the fear of death surrounds them like the cockroaches that invade their house every morning.

The corpse in particular is linked to trauma as it leaks from the category of the dead to the living through the presence of a once-alive body. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection* (1982) Kristeva defines the corpse as existing in a liminal category as it is of the body, yet not a living body and is therefore the “most sickening of wastes” because it is “at the border” of being alive (Kristeva 3). The body becomes signified through language, which is when a sense of self, as I and not I, becomes established. Kristeva considers how the establishing of boundaries happens in the body by pointing to its constructed symbolism, therefore what breaks down the boundary and threatens the self as a separate being, is rejected by the body as an abject threat: “What is abject is not my correlative [...] The abject has only one quality of the object - that of being opposed to I” (Kristeva 1). The dead body is neither the opposite of the subject as it reflects the living body, nor like the living body as it is now like the bodily products, removed from the living being. The dead body therefore holds great significance, not just as it can become the site of trauma in that it is the missed experience of the trauma as discussed in Rosaleen’s encounter with Aidan’s missing body, but the corpse as a present body can produce an encounter with the uncanny, or be engaged with as part of the quest for meaning both for the self and its place within society. Kristeva considers how the corpse is an encounter with death that changes the subjective view:

The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. (Kristeva 4)

The very way that the corpse is both like and not like the body is the way that it exists as a threat to identity. Anderson returns many times in her work to the dead body, as for example, when Fran remembers her revulsion whilst forced to kiss her grandfather’s corpse. As Fran looks at the body she is struck by the way it is obscenely like her living grandfather and she feels a sense of nausea at what she imagines is the smell of rotting flesh (Anderson 102). Like “The Marvellous Boy” the symbol of the cockroach signifies the fear of death and the return of the encounter with the not-knowing of death. The corpse as a physical body without life is no longer within the symbolic social order. It disturbs identity by breaking down the boundaries but is also a site where the trauma

of death exists beyond an understanding of what it means to be dead. As such, death remains in a place of traumatic repetition so that the return of the body returns the subject to the site of trauma, that is to their original encounter with the trauma of their own fear of death. Fran and Ruth's repetition of encounters with death, reflects their return to their initial traumatic encounter with their own mortality: subsequent encounters with dead bodies returns them to their trauma, thus repeating the behaviour they first displayed at that primary moment when death infected their experience of life.

National Identity and the Trauma of War

Anderson shows how Fran's traumatic experiences in *Cuckoo* compound her crisis of identity displacement from Northern Ireland, which is experienced as a rejection by both her British and Irish heritages. Fran describes her positioning within Britain as that of an unaccepted immigrant, however her nationalist views are complicated by the politics that classify Northern Ireland as British territory. Dominic assumes she is Catholic when he exoticises her background, and several of the people she meets in London label her as the Irish other. His friends call her "a wee colleen [...] part o' the Emerald Isle" and consider her anti-nuclear views as "an IRA supporter telling us we should disarm" (Anderson 86). Fran does not acknowledge this separation within politics and is angry at their over-simplification of her nationality and political beliefs. She states that, "in the north-east corner of Ireland where I come from, we're British citizens. Some more reluctant and some are enthusiastic about it" (Anderson 87). Fran explains how her Anglo-Irish background means that she is represented in nationalist politics as the "oppressors and usurpers", who do not belong in Ireland, yet she is also rejected by the English who see her as part of "one big homogenous bunch of demented Paddies" (Anderson 87). Fran's nationalism rejects the colonisation of Ireland by Britain and thus she aligns herself with the colonised. However her attempts to refute the simplistic bifurcation of her status as a Protestant unionist by embracing nationalism, does not prevent her Catholic husband's family and his nationalist friends rejecting her as an "aberration" (Anderson 126). Fran's exploration of identity echoes Anderson's own background. Born in 1949 into a Protestant working-class family of five children, with a Canadian mother, she refuses to be aligned with the simplistic divisional politics associated with her background: "I simply detested Protestantism and Unionism. My identification with the Catholic 'other' was partly a flight from the despised, disowned familiar. I also saw it as a radical, anti-segregationist act"

(Anderson, *Thesis* 92). Fran, like Anderson rejects her background, but does so as part of the post-trauma fracturing of her identity. *Cuckoo* thus challenges the binarisms of class, race, and gender stereotyping to allow a re-thinking of power relationships and boundaries.

Fran, like Cornelius, her African neighbour feels she has been “dispossessed” and has nowhere to call “home”(Anderson 90). She takes a universal attitude to her politics, suggesting there are “no frontiers any more” as everyone unites to fight for peace and Civil Rights” (Anderson 88). Fran sees her life in terms of being a woman identifying and fighting against prejudices and oppression. Her traumatic experiences have given her insight into the role of the oppressed, which enables her empathy towards the fight for minority Civil Rights. Fran’s alignment with the dispossessed and her essentialist stand is explored in her interactions with Cornelius and Marilyn, who both suggest that as a middle-class white woman she cannot have experienced the inequalities and injustices that they have experienced. Anderson notes there is diversity of experience along gender, race and class divides, but suggests ultimately that the feminist movement works best when women fight together for a common cause such as the anti-war protests.²⁸ The strong anti-nuclear message of the novel allows Anderson to consider a new space where gender and its social expectations can be redefined. Within her argument there is an understanding that men also have suffered from patriarchal binds and many of the men in the novel are trapped behind an understanding of gender that does not allow for personal freedoms. Anderson’s writing conveys how 1980s feminisms bridged the gap between biological essentialism where gender was defined in terms of binarisms such as male/female, home/work and so on, and the expanding concept of sex as a social construct. Anderson echoes how feminists such as Kristeva, de Beauvoir and Irigaray were opening up definitions of identity using post-structuralism and later postcolonial theories, thus gaining a deeper understanding of how the body could be understood in terms of social discourse, constructs and expectations. In addition Anderson shows how Fran is however trapped in a sequence of loss and return, which (similar to Beckett’s protagonist) is connected to her lost home, albeit with an element of choice rather than force. She rejects her childhood home and her parent’s values and political beliefs, yet she is trapped in a pattern of repeating this moment of rejection. Similarly she has been displaced from Belfast, yet is trapped in a

²⁸ Anderson echoes these ideas in her own life and participated in Northern Ireland Civil Rights protests in 1968 (Weekes 15).

pattern of returning to her national identity through her encounter with the people she meets in England who challenge her consideration of herself as British. Thus Fran remains in a state of flux, neither able to build up her gender, nor her national identity.

Fran embodies the traumas of her own past, but also the collective traumas of the violent history of wars, which raises the question of the role of time as well as geography within the novel. Northern Ireland's conflict is shown in the novel not merely as an isolated historical problem, but as involved with the changes that were happening all over the world, particularly as it is part of the Civil Rights Movement and the Cold War. The importance of contextualising time and war within its generational and geographical connections is highlighted in the title to chapter one, "The Still Turning Point of the World: May 1982" which is a quotation from "Burnt Norton" the first poem in T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. This poem was written during the Second World War and conveys Eliot's concept of time from his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" to show how death and time are explored through the sensual perceptions of present time. The still point to which Eliot refers is the central axle of the wheel, which is a metaphor exploring time as made up of many patterns and opposing points. The body becomes important within the contemplation of time as it chains or grounds human experience. For Anderson to bring this to the fore at the very beginning of her novel is to point to the conflicting ideas she will raise within her character as she considers the particular time and space at the centre of the manifold issues. Time for Fran is held within the dynamics of trauma, where her present day experience remains in a time of war with an uncertain future, which is simultaneously influenced by her traumatic past as it returns to haunt her. Time and space may therefore on the one hand be specific to Fran's experience, but only in so much as the traumas of the past and her fears for the future allow. Eliot's poem therefore with its reference to time during war is an appropriate starting point for the novel as it highlights the importance of placing trauma within its contextual framework. In the case of *Cuckoo*, Anderson firmly grounds her protagonist's trauma as a leakage of her past experiences of the Troubles within the contexts of the various war issues relevant to the 1980s.

Cuckoo draws comparisons between the Cold War, the Falkland War and the Troubles, to show how Northern Ireland is not separate from the world political scene, but is very much a part of the western move towards Civil Rights and anti-war. Only two of the chapters are given dates, the first chapter as mentioned above, "The Still Point of the

Turning World, May 1982” and chapter fifteen “Words, September 1984”. Both these chapters reference significant political events connected to war. In chapter one Fran notices the slogan “nuke the Argies” on the back of a workman’s shirt and reads in the Sunday papers about the “Task Force ‘mission’ to the Falklands” (Anderson 16). Anderson uses the placing of this recognition of war trauma alongside Fran’s personal trauma to expose the interrelatedness of the Troubles to world events. May 1982 is a significant date in the Falkland’s crisis as it was time of the controversial sinking of the General Belgrano with the death of 368 Argentines. This was the only ship to be sunk in a war by a nuclear powered submarine, which links it to the second major event in that month, the first blockade of Greenham Common by 250 women protestors. As the threat of nuclear war became more visible, it became a key area for the already activated peace protestors to focus upon. Nuclear threat is also central to chapter fifteen, which opens with a diatribe against President Reagan for naming the MX missile “The Peacemaker” by asking how a missile can be seen as “guarding” or “creating” peace (Anderson 133). In this way Anderson shows the specificity of war in the 1980s alongside their historical connections, which suggests a collective return of the repressed. She continues to draw connections between wars by showing how the current nuclear threat is connected to the traumas of previous atrocities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.²⁹ Anderson reinforces these connections by taking her characters into this campaign with several scenes set in and around the Greenham Common Protest Camps. The final scene brings the nuclear anti-war protest alongside discussions of gender and the Troubles when Fran discusses the traumatised past with her husband Paul in the Greenham Camp.

Anderson draws connections not just among nuclear wars, but also explores through the interconnections of modern life how intergenerational trauma is relevant to all forms of warfare. The bomb was a symbol central to anti-war demonstrations over the world, with protests for freedom, equality and peace. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights protestors did not see their cause as localised but part of the wider movement; members were in touch with and used literature from the American Civil Rights groups and formed an allegiance to fight for minority rights. Eamonn McCann from the Derry Labour Party describes a deliberate alignment of national politics with a universal sense

²⁹ September 1984 saw the broadcasting of the nuclear war docudrama *Threads* on BBC television. This was a shocking portrayal of the after-effects of a nuclear explosion in Sheffield, not only of the immediate deaths, but of the breaking down of society and even language. People were depicted dying from radiation, murdered by looters and aging prematurely with infertility and birth defects so that the population dwindling to under 10 million.

of justice, whereby many people felt an affinity to Martin Luther King's call for a world-wide struggle toward justice and dignity for all.³⁰ This is an important message implied, and at times overtly present, within Anderson's writing. The social changes that were happening in Belfast were not just parochial but were connected to what was happening across Europe. The fall out from the Cold War was also impacting politics in less visible forms. Britain had a vested interest in keeping Northern Ireland under its control during this time and was under pressure from America to allow access to the same military bases as were used during the Second World War. Anderson's focus on the nuclear threat as a universal problem, connects with the way that she positions Northern Irish politics and unrest within the larger political picture. From this perspective the Troubles can no longer be viewed as an isolated problem happening, as Dominic's friends had suggested, "over there" in another country, with people infighting over historical problems (Anderson 87). Instead, the Troubles become a part of the wider story of student protest and subsequent social division during the Cold War and Civil Rights protests.

The rejection of war is a major theme in Anderson's writing and *Cuckoo* uses the anti-war protests in Greenham Common as a metaphor of the protests in Northern Ireland. Anderson does this by showing how Fran sees connections between the two experiences. Fran describes her first visit to the camp on 12 December 1982 in terms of "personal and homely things in that cold menacing place" and remembers the whole nine miles of fencing covered in flowers, children's clothes and toys, family photographs and even human hair (Anderson 76).³¹ This was a life-changing experience for Fran who comes to understand war as connected to the private world of the family. Like the Troubles, nuclear war is a war that could not be separated from homes and streets. The description Anderson gives of the camp at the Orange Gate uses language and images that link it to images of World War One; the mud, fragile shelters, no-man's land of Salisbury Plain and lack of sleep for the frontline: "It's so ghostly here. As if it had already been the site of a mass extermination" (Anderson 78). The mass extermination could refer to World War I battlefield soldiers or the Holocaust of World War II. This imagery thus accesses the sites of memory of war and death, to show how the fight against nuclear missiles is a repetition of the traumas of war. In addition it

³⁰ Fanning, Michael. Producer. *The Day the Troubles Began*. BBC One Northern Ireland, Oct. 2008.

³¹ This date signifies an actual historical event "Embrace the Base", which involved 30,000 women holding hands and singing songs for peace around the military air base in a peaceful protest against the nuclear threat of the missiles housed inside.

brings the women into the war zone to show their direct engagement with frontline battles against future threats of death.

The women in the anti-nuclear protest are shown in a battle against the state and their representative “army” of police. The police are seen as aggressors, uniformed men denying women their right to protest and ultimately their right to a peaceful life. When Fran and her friends go to the main gate where the protestors are expecting a convoy of missiles, and lie down in the road to try to stop the lorries, the police drag the women away until the convoy of weapons have passed: “ ‘Aren’t you ashamed?’ a woman yelled at them. ‘You’re *our* police! This is *our* land. The British people did not vote for these missiles! She screamed as she was dragged along the ground” (Anderson 79). As Edkins says in *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* the acknowledgement that the police represent the state suggests a sudden recognition that the very powers that are expected to protect are responsible for threatening and endangering lives. Edkins also suggests that the true basis of trauma is not helplessness in the threat of danger but a “betrayal of trust” from the individuals or authorities that are perceived to be protectorates: “trauma takes place when the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors” (Edkins 4). Social order relies on the survival of the individual within a community through abiding by specific codes, which suggests safety does not take into account power relations. During traumas such as war, the power of the state over the individual or group is exposed and the sense of helplessness and betrayal becomes central to the trauma. The women fighting against nuclear threat are positioned as soldiers whose bodies are abused by the very authority figures whose uniform signifies their role as protectors. The novel therefore engages with images of war to show how it traumatises and positions individuals, it exposes state authority over the body, and it brings women back into the war as subjective fighters as opposed to objects of victimhood. In this way, war and trauma are shown to have specific impacts on the body, which takes into account how it is represented by its gendered identity.

Trauma, Gender and the Body

Anderson considers the importance of gendering the traumatised body by exploring how Fran can be viewed within the framework of 1980s feminist theories. Fran sees herself fractured and broken by her traumas, which impacts on her understanding of herself as a woman: her traumas are held within her physical body thus influencing how she

perceives the female body. Anderson shows how, despite the developing feminist movement of the 1980s many women remain trapped under negative representations of the female form. She explores the role of the literary canon, advertisement and magazine, and language itself as platforms of gender inequality. Her writing challenges how women are perceived during times of conflict and demonstrates the creation of spaces beyond patriarchal confines where women can explore their sense of self. The liminality of language needed to express trauma, which revolves around such properties as metaphor and narrative gaps, can also create spaces for exploring identity beyond the confines of the text. As Gill Plain points out in her study of Second World War literature, it is within literature that women can find a space to rewrite gender beyond the confines of patriarchal rule. In *Cuckoo* Anderson conveys the particularities of a traumatised female to consider how the female body and subjectivity are open to specific forms of wounding. As Hartman suggests: “words are always armed and capable of wounding”, thus the voice and the male gaze can cause harm to female identity (Hartman 273). The body is both a site for the memory of the trauma and the physical space for engaging with gender identity. In its imprisoned form the body is also a place where trauma, nationality and gender interact and where identity markers are displaced. The female body and its literary representation are central to Anderson’s writing and therefore the body cannot be removed from discussions of identity; it is central to an understanding of the self and others and is open to gender signification.

By prioritising the female body Anderson is able to explore representations of the feminised form. She explores the dead body, the pregnant body, the decaying body and the body imprisoned by religious doctrine into denying its sexuality. The sexualised female body in the first chapter of *Cuckoo* is depicted negatively as it has become signified and objectified, written upon by the male gaze. Fran suggests heterosexual marriage is a lie that enslaves the woman into domesticity and patriarchy: “Lie-ing together. About ourselves, our pasts. I had done enough of that. Betraying my history into speech. Cosmetic tales” (Anderson 12). Anderson deliberately uses duplicity of meaning in her choice of words, such as ‘cosmetic’, which is a pun on the fabrication of the female form that is displayed in photographs in women’s magazines, a major debate within feminism in the 1980s. She considers how gender is a social construction that has prevented women from creating a positive view of their bodies and their sexuality. Fran begins her first sexual relationship enjoying her own body and the sensations of arousal. It is only when her fellow classmates pin pornography onto her desk that she feels any

sense of shame. Fran sees in the photographs the female form sexually objectified as a commodity for male desire: “Love and sex, sex and freedom, separated in my mind. [...] What was free about those grovelling, glaze-eyed women?” (Anderson 114). Fran finds herself unable to enjoy her body without considering how her sexual desire might label her as “wanton”. She has become aware of how she may be viewed as a sexual object for male pleasure and this destroys her enjoyment of her own sexuality. Anderson takes the negative view of the female body to its extreme by showing how Fran’s passivity towards her body becomes destructive to her sense of self. The death of her boyfriend, her husband’s rejection of her sexuality and the enforced abortion of her child, leaves Fran destroyed in her emotional responses to her sexuality and motherhood.

There are myriad references in *Cuckoo* to women whose primary concern becomes sensations, desires, and bodily experiences. Fran says “my skin had a memory of its own” (Anderson 60). Her friend Caroline also expresses herself primarily with her body. In parallel chapters Fran and Caroline tell the story of their pregnancies. Caroline’s is told through the third person: “She thought about herself continuously even though she was no one. Her body was the only real fact about her” (Anderson 30). Caroline suggests that she has come to see herself defined only by her physical female form, her identity has become deformed through the images of womanhood that her parents and husband have projected upon her. Fran’s chapter comes from a first person perspective, which also manages to objectify her body: “My abdomen began to balloon and swell. The breasts were heavy and unbearable to touch. The teeth ached” (Anderson 18). Fran, while acknowledging a connection to her pregnancy, refers to her breasts and teeth with the definitive article “the” instead of the personal pronoun “my” to suggest they are alienated from her body. She cannot speak and her voice is weak from non-use but Fran is narrating herself in physical rather than verbal forms. Her body is given precedence as it becomes a swollen abdomen and heavy breasted, thus symbolising the femaleness of her pregnancy. Fran’s response to her trauma is to detach her body from her sense of her self, so that the body was physically present but emotionally absent: “I would be safe inside the ghetto of my own flesh. At once I felt stronger. His words started to bounce off me and fall dead in heaps” (Anderson 13). This points toward the breaking down of the human to become a physical being, which is emphasised through her pregnancy. Fran is aware only of the physicality of being alive: “I slept until afternoon most days, then dressed with supernatural slowness [...] most of my days were groggy and neutral” (Anderson 11). Trauma has reduced Fran to her physical

sensations and bodily experiences. Her past identity has become disconnected from her current self and she waits in her room, in much the same way as her baby grows inside her body, for a new sense of herself to emerge.

Anderson's description of Fran's objectification shows how the male gaze becomes a negative rejection of her femininity. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* discusses how the male gaze places the female as object to the male seeing subject, therefore "woman" becomes a socially constructed category given meaning by patriarchy. In de Beauvoir's terminology the male has influenced the female's attitude to her own body, thus representing her sexuality and her reproductive ability as disadvantageous. This is shown graphically in a scene between Fran and Paul where he strips her naked and treats her like an animal under inspection:

He kept frowning and did not launch into any of the swift technicalities which he called foreplay. He cupped my breasts in his hand as if testing their weight, then circled me, surveying my body. He tweaked my waist and I started to tremble, waiting for his fingers to poke me like cattleprods.
[...] 'Cover yourself up.' An exercise in humiliation. (Anderson 128)

This scene is reminiscent of descriptions of slave markets where the human body was reduced to flesh and examined in a similar way to animal livestock and thus highlights the traumatic impact this has on Fran's already weakened image of herself as a woman. What Paul was focusing on was the female components of her body, particularly when he rejects her breasts, which symbolises her womanhood and child-rearing. This scene is followed by Fran considering how Paul had described his mother as a reproductive "bovine", producing and rearing nine children. The cluster of words connected with cattle and animalistic features reduces female reproduction and connects it to an earlier description of a man, "panting like a bull" when he sexually assaulted the young Fran (Anderson 96). Her father's response to this is to describe men as animals and to suggest to the young girl that it is her responsibility to guard against male assaults. The sexualised female body is reflected back to Fran as both commodity and dangerous 'other' to male rationality. The performative act of gendering under the male gaze is thus destructive to the female identity, and Fran's experiences cluster to transform her sense of self.

Anderson chooses to place her focus firmly on the female body in a way that is very different from how the female form is typically portrayed in war literature. Eyes, seeing,

and the male gaze are connected to issues of witnessing. Fran begins to see women's physical suffering as part of her own suffering, and she retreats into a prison of her own making:

Locking my door. I borrowed books from Dominic's study, [...] concentrated on the photographs. Women in the Transkei staring at the camera. Blaming no one. Separated from their men. Their children starving. [...] Maimed and bleeding bodies in the Lebanon, Iraq, Ireland. The blood always black and still in these pictures, not the way I remembered it on Irish streets, bright, glistening, spreading. (Anderson 83)

Fran identifies with the women in the pictures and understands "the paralysing effect of such pictures" that turn her into a "helpless witness" to death (Anderson 83). The women's bodies have been objectified as victims of war, which places Fran in a negative position as she witnesses the suffering from a place of safety. Fran notes the difference between the blackness of the photographed blood and her memories of women's real red blood, which suggests that the traumas of war cannot be captured in art. Anderson is partaking in the debate about Seamus Heaney's "artful voyeur" from his poem "Punishment" (*North*, 1975) where the poet "stood dumb" while women's bodies were abused for "tribal, intimate revenge" (Heaney 117). Heaney compares the tribal revenge of adultery to the tribal punishment beatings in Belfast, using suffering to create images, thus suggesting a duplicity with the artist as a witness or bystander to the trauma. Anderson's writing points in several places to the role women endured in times of conflict and how the female form is objectified in representations of war. Heaney has been challenged for his objectification of the female body in this poem and Anderson suggests that such use of the body has an impact on women's sense of self.³² Women "paralysed" as passive objects, lose their subjectivity and authorship. Fran struggles against this throughout the novel to gain her female autonomy. She expresses her anger at male thinkers such as Sartre who have influenced perceptions of women's bodies through negative imagery that equates copulation and pregnancy to violation, infection and death.³³

Women give life, they say, but we're really feeding death, labouring for death. 'Cunt', I thought of that sullen word that men use to mean the woman herself, not just the hunted hated rip in her flesh. And it's not only the sleazos and the

³² Heaney's *The Government of the Tongue* (1988) opened a major debate within Northern Irish literary circles about the role of the poet as witness and over the objectification of female bodies in his work.

³³ Sartre was being criticised by feminists for his imagery of women and the key proponents to whom Anderson may be referring are Margery L. Collins and Christine Pierce whose essay "Holes and Slime: Sexism in Sartre's Psychoanalysis" became influential in feminist thinking on Sartre.

creeps who think like that, but the intellectual ‘giants’ like Sartre. ‘Woman is a slimy gaping hole. She represents nothingness.’

I was a fermenting bog, a piece of perforated flesh that could be penetrated by the penis, the finger, the broken bottle, invaded by germs and sperms. (Anderson 22)

Anderson uses the specific term “bog” to evoke Heaney’s bog poems, which were criticised for objectifying and utilising as a metaphor, women’s bodies uncovered from Irish bogs. In his poem “Bog Queen” Heaney has the female body speak to the reader, rendering herself in physical terms of decay, which is in sharp contrast to “The Tollund Man”, where the male is represented by the face and it is the ground around the male body that is feminised in negative terms. In this passage Anderson gives Fran a framework for understanding her trauma within the feminisation of her body. Like many of Anderson’s characters, this framework includes an emphasis on the futility of life, an engagement with death and an exploration of what it means to be a woman within the context of western conceptual thinking. By naming Sartre, Anderson exposes the philosophy behind her novel as the exploration of identity via the French existentialism of Sartre and de Beauvoir.

In their post-trauma periods both Fran in *Cuckoo* and Gerry and Rosaleen in *To Stay Alive*, look to the writing of Sartre as an expression of the existential meaninglessness of life. Des, the soldier who committed suicide had gone through a “Sartre period”, Rosaleen’s friend mentions she is “revising Sartre” and quotes Flaubert’s, “there is no happiness, only the occasional absence of pain” (Anderson 80, 68). Fran considers Sartre as one of her “adopted ghost fathers” who provides a negative representation of the female body (Anderson 98). Anderson’s writing about trauma would appear to connect to Sartre’s existentialism by highlighting the dominant role of being in the material body during the event, and in the periods when the individual returns to the trauma. In addition she shows through her characters, a sceptical attitude to the role played by the conscious during and after trauma, such as its ability to de-humanise, to forget the history and individuality of a community that is placed as the ‘enemy’ during a war, and the ability of the conscious mind to suppress the horrors of what it has witnessed against that community. The death or removal of the human could be considered using Sartre’s theory as a trauma of negation, as a void that has appeared where the person once was. The missing body is therefore not just an absence but a physical presence of the nothingness that now exists in place of the person who was once there. As Eng and Kazanjian have commented in their study on *Loss: The Politics*

of *Mourning* the process of grief is engaged not only with what is lost but with what it is that remains. They consider Freud's differentiation of mourning as a process acknowledging the loss as a past event, which is separate from melancholia as it experiences loss as a continuous present. The terms and description used by Eng and Kazanjian to describe the melancholic encounter with death or loss show similarities to those used to describe trauma:

In this regard, we find in Freud's conception of melancholia's persistent struggle with its lost objects not simply a 'grasping' or 'holding' on to a fixed notions of the past but rather a continuous engagement with loss and its remains. This engagement generates sites of memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimagining of the future. (Eng and Kazanjian 4)

The idea of re-living the past in the present day reality is attributed as a symptom of PTSD. Trauma creates sites of memory similar to those that can be found in the memorialising process described above. Therefore the particular form of loss experienced by Anderson's protagonists is the melancholia of loss; the continual re-engagement with the death, which points to their loss as separated from the usual mourning of the dead. This suggests that the missing bodies are experienced as a trauma and thus Anderson is expanding in *Cuckoo* on the encounter with death and missing bodies that she began in her first novel *To Stay Alive*.

In Fran's description of her reaction to Nick's death she acknowledges her obsession with his missing body and her own bodily response to the grieving process. It is her body that misses his physical presence and her body that fails to perform its every day activities: her body has become the site of memory for the missing body of Nick. When Fran's mother becomes impatient with her melancholia she tells Fran: "Surely you *do* something! For crying out loud, are you trying to turn yourself into a memorial?" (Anderson 118) Fran's body registers her loss, becoming a site for her trauma but she refuses to accept the traumatic death as a past event. She tries to explain to her father that she cannot "accept" Nick's death and that she has become "afraid of violence, its constant threat and unalterable course" (Anderson 120). Fran rejects the process of forgetting and accepting, which she considers as aligning with the "necessary sacrifice" of human bodies for political purposes. "Accept one death. Accept thousands. [...] Measuring the abyss would not bring about its removal" (Anderson 121). Fran's inability to accept Nick's loss leads her into a relationship where she repeats the pattern of loss. Paul treats her body with guilty contempt, which echoes Fran's post-trauma

reaction to her body. She describes how she “sought revenge” upon her body, looking for “oblivion through sex (Anderson 9). Paul’s treatment of her body and his own trauma led him to force her into an abortion, where she experiences the loss of the foetus as another missing body that she cannot mourn. When Paul leaves her without warning or saying goodbye, he becomes a third missing body in her life. His loss brings Fran’s body back to its responses when Nick died and she shuts down once again. Her body returns to a site of memory for the losses and she becomes a memorial for the missing bodies, which are experienced as traumatic deaths.

The experience of trauma is connected to the missing body through Fran’s lack of knowing, which is central to her experience of death. In *Unclaimed Experience* Caruth suggests that part of mourning is how the body, “erases the event of its own death” and points to the specificities of unknowability, suggesting that the most important aspect of the traumatic encounter with death is the conscious absence from the experience of death (Caruth 29). There remains “an unbridgeable abyss, an inherent gap of knowing, [...] the moment of the other’s death” (Caruth 39). Fran’s trauma is the death of Nick, which is not witnessed but told through a third party. She realises that the sound of the explosion she had heard earlier that day had signalled the moment of death. At the time she was unaware of the significance of the sound and analysed it merely by the size of the explosion:

I remembered it then, the dull crump I had heard in the afternoon. I remembered thinking: ‘That’s only a two or three pounder.’[...] She said that he had died instantly with no pain, no horror. I couldn’t cry or speak. I wanted out of that room as if his death were true only in that place where it had been spoken. (Anderson 115)

At this point Fran is unable to associate what she had recognised as a relatively small explosion by Belfast standards, with the devastation that this meant for her life: the scale of the bomb was not in keeping with its results therefore she is unable to accept the death. Fran begins a physical journey through the streets of Belfast to recover the missing event of the death, but with no physical evidence or knowledge she repeatedly attempts to regain the moment of death:

I went for long walks all over the city, no longer afraid of the ‘troubled’ areas, no longer bothering to look to the left and to the right. There was no such thing as a safe area. I knew that now. No place of safety. All the futile little rules of self-protection ticker taped through. [...] I tried over and over again to imagine Nick on that final day. [...] I recomposed those hours with a desperate ingenuity

as if by rewriting the start and the middle of the story I could transform its conclusion. He didn't die. Could not die. I went to the site of the bomb. Rubble everywhere. The pub door still absurdly intact and upright, standing somehow without support. There was no weight, no smell of death. The rain had washed away the blood. (Anderson 116)

She is not able to physically see or touch the dead body, therefore the death remains beyond her comprehension. It is only by hearing Nick's name read out through the official channel of the radio that she can begin to accept it as a truth: "The tally was announced: three dead, eight injured, two seriously. One of the dead was Nicholas Fitzpatrick, a twenty-four year-old research student. Loud, clear, and implacable. A fact" (Anderson 116). This public statement makes the death a fact for her conscious mind, but the missing body remains not fully known. At the funeral the coffin is closed because the condition of the remains of the body were considered unfit for viewing and all that Fran has to narrate Nick's death are the public words marking his gravestone: "1950-1974. Murdered by Terrorists on the sixteenth day of June" (Anderson 117). The true horror is the unknowability of the moment of Nick's death. It is only when Nick's mother tries to give Fran his watch that Fran encounters the missing body. The watch is symbolic of the time they spent together and now signifies the end of these memories; the sound of the ticking of the minutes marks the time Nick no longer has. The watch is there, but the body is missing and by connecting its physical presence to her memories of it upon the living body Fran can finally acknowledge the loss: "Images flashed before me: Nick and I huddled in the back of the car, me lifting his wrist to check the time from the glowing numerals. The sound of ticking in my ear when he held me a certain way" (Anderson 118). The watch becomes a synecdoche for the missing body and Fran can connect the reality of the disconnection of the past living body to the present dead body.

Fran considers further the problematics of understanding, knowing and narrating trauma in "Doing Time" when Fran's body is not missing but imprisoned after her arrest at a Greenham protest. In Newburn prison she finds herself in a cell with Marilyn, a young woman who refuses to speak and as Fran begins her own story she realises she is carefully constructing her narrative by omitting those people and experiences that are too distressing for her to talk about. In essence she is doing exactly the same thing as her cell-mate; remaining silent about key identity-markers in her life. She says:

All the bits of my past that I was carefully leaving out: Nick, Paul, Stella, started pressing in on me, and I felt my anger mounting, an anger not really connected with Marilyn, but with all those others who were beyond my reach. Misery rose in me like a physical pain and I shut up. (Anderson 144)

What this quotation acknowledges is the difficulty of telling and of being heard: of speaking of trauma and of connecting with the listener. It would appear to agree with Caruth's statement that the actual moments of trauma are unknowable, and as such create difficulties when attempting to uncover a way in which there might be an expression of that trauma for a witness. Fran is unable to narrate the details about her life that are an important part of her formative expression of her identity, such as her traumatic childhood relationship with her mother. Like Marilyn her silent cell-mate, Fran remains "shut up" unable to speak in straightforward terms about the heart of the experiences of her traumas. Eleanore Holveck uses the image of a prison to describe how female writers are trapped by language and concepts that have historically been male-centric: "If we want to deal with problems of communication effectively, we have to smash the walls of our father's prison or at least leave the individual cells and try to communicate with those who live in the other ones" (Holveck 160). Anderson similarly acknowledges the problems of language and concepts that trap women, or disempower them, rather than freeing them to express their traumas.

Fran is shown in both a literal and metaphorical prison throughout most of the novel. To experience imprisonment as a woman is to be made aware of the authoritative control over the female body. Fran is forced to give control of her body over to the prison guards when she is ordered to strip naked and they prod her entire body and orifices:

'I am not a criminal,' I kept thinking. 'I cannot be ashamed.'
But I was. How easy it is to be humiliated through the body! I thought about the Nazis and their systematic degradation of the Jews. A trick every oppressor knows, how to activate the victim's self-loathing. (Anderson 138)

Anderson expresses Fran's horror of becoming nothing more than a biological entity at the mercy of an all powerful aggressor and she does so by using terms relating to the Holocaust. Giorgio Agamben has argued in his essay "What is a Camp?" and his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* that the prisoner loses their sense of relational identity to become merely a body devoid of all political and legal status beyond that of biopolitics. The concept that imprisonment is experienced foremost in and by the body, so that the person's identity and means of relating to the external world

are all body experiences, is important when taken alongside issues of gender and trauma. When reduced to a body, Fran is forced to consider the relationship of her identity to her body, how her body has been used as a weapon and as a defence mechanism to protect her from her memories, and ultimately she explores how it works as a site of memory for her traumatised past self. This scene also allows Anderson to reference Northern Irish politics when she notes that Fran is categorised as a “political prisoner” and therefore treated differently by both the guards and the other prisoners. The guards deliberately divide the group to prevent them becoming a “disruptive influence”, whereas the prisoners laugh at their “idealism” (Anderson 139). As she has done elsewhere in her short story “Skin” Anderson explores the role of the prisoner within society and notes the difference between the definition of a criminal and a political prisoner. Anderson is using this chapter to reference the political fight of the Maze Hunger Strikers, and is therefore highlighting the role of the body in gender and national identity.

Anderson does not directly describe the Hunger Strikers and the devastation of the families who were suffering after Thatcher’s refusal to hear their political demands, but instead she engages with images of imprisoned and starving bodies. The refusal of food is another way that the body becomes a weapon in an ideological war. There are several references to eating or refusing food in the novel. For example Stella is described as an anorexic, Caroline discusses her eating disorder, and Fran’s father describes how he was force-fed his dinner if he refused to eat it (Anderson 120). Other examples connect specifically to images of prisons, camps and trauma. One example of this is Fran’s memory of a nine year old girl who is given valium when she is traumatised by a rat eating her fingers. Another reference is of how the prisoners in the concentration camps decided to electrocute themselves on the fence rather than go into the gas chambers:

Suddenly I remembered one of my grandmother’s concentration camp stories. There were certain prisoners who electrocuted themselves on the perimeter fences of the camp rather than walk into the gas chambers. They acted out of despair and terror, she said. But I knew there was pride there too. A refusal. They chose the time and means of their deaths. Cheated their murderers. I would never give consent to Nick’s death. Never consent to anything that ought not to be. Inevitable is only a word. (Anderson 121)

Both these anecdotes reference the Holocaust and raise the issue of the role of the body within war and trauma. Anderson’s use of prison stories could be seen as a comment on the imprisoned body, which LaCapra categorises as a non-person, or a being without

political status or identity. The Maze prisoners were fighting to keep their status as political prisoners rather than criminals or terrorists and the only means they had was their bodies. They began with the blanket protest, which was a refusal to wear prison uniforms, moved onto the dirty protest which involved smearing excrement on the walls of their cell and finally refusing food to force the authorities to reconsider how labelling their actions as criminal was against their nationalist beliefs. In all the above examples the only empowerment available was by turning the body into a weapon or voice of protest during a time of war.

Words, Wounding and Female Subjectivity

The ability or inability of words to express truths or to imprison is a theme running throughout *Cuckoo*. In particular Anderson focuses on how words can be weapons, “swords” working alongside imagery to force a perception of gender that imprisons both sexes. Hartman associates the written word with the naming process and how this impacts with identity issues: “naming and the problem of identity cannot be dissociated. So literature and the problem of identity cannot be dissociated” (Hartman 278). He suggests that signification can cause trauma, as the power of words that are either heard or read, can be used as weapons to harm others. Words, as Anderson points to throughout her novel, can be used to define the self in a way that can hurt the individual or group being defined, as for example in Sartre’s definition of women as negative “holes” othering the positive presence of the phallic. Hartman emphasises that the powerfulness of such negative words can in themselves be traumatic: “But it turns out that by wounding I mean principally the expectations that a self can be defined or constituted by words, if they are direct enough, and the traumatic consequences of that expectation” (Hartman 281). Anderson’s protagonists consider how the words that are used to define them have negative consequences on their perception of their female identity, which suggests a connection between trauma and gender when considering the fracturing of identity. Rosaleen is depicted as fighting against the boundaries of naming and the male gaze to create a sense of herself beyond patriarchal signification. Similarly Fran crosses all the bifurcations that are placed upon her identity, both where this concerns her gender and her national identity. She refuses the labels that are placed upon her, which seek to define her in ways that she does not define herself, while also refusing to be disowned from the identity she sees as her human right.

Fran moves from the voiceless victim at the beginning of the novel, who finds herself locked in a metaphorical prison partially of her own making, into the phase where her story is re-inscribed through the male voice, towards a space where she can write a new story in the company of women. Fran struggles to talk about herself even in physical terms, and much of her life-story remains unexplored or untold. The story of Fran's traumatic past is particularly difficult to know as it is removed from Fran's interpretation and framed through another person's perspective; it is told through Dominic's interpretation of the two objects that hold powerful insights into her life; the tape of Emily's father, the Black South African immigrant, and a journal, which tells the story of her boyfriend's death from a Belfast bomb. It is worth noting that Fran does not at any point tell the narrative of her past traumas in any direct fashion. There is no attempt to bring her memories of the past into her present life. She is physically removed from them by placing herself beyond Northern Ireland and living a lifestyle that is completely removed from her background. Her abandonment of her diary when she leaves Dominic and Caroline's home repeats her abandonment of her past when she left Ireland. Dominic thinks that he understands Fran's pull away from what he sees as normal life: "Her allegiance was to the dark tenements, the dark places, the cold wilderness of Greenham Common, anywhere where there could be no forgetting of the real world and its countless trapdoors into madness and death" (Anderson 91). However as Anderson is quick to point out, Dominic, who has only experienced the comforts of his middle-class life, cannot fully comprehend Fran's traumas: "The darkened glass gave back his own face" (Anderson 91). Dominic can only understand Fran through the lens of his own experiences. The only place where her story exists is in her diary, which remains as an external space no longer in her possession. By physically leaving behind the sites of her memories, by leaving Ireland and her abandonment of the diary, Fran is expressing her rejection of her traumatic past and ultimately her repression of these traumas. Anderson's story however shows that Fran is unconsciously returning to her suppressed traumas.

Anderson shows how Fran becomes voiceless after her encounter with trauma. When she moves into the flat Fran's voice is described as so weak she finds herself whispering to Cornelius. As she becomes more pregnant she uses her voice less and less: "My throat was so tight I could only mutter to the cashier. I tried to avoid the necessity for speech" (Anderson 18). She has changed from a person who wielded words like weapons to someone who is afraid of words: "Words were what I loved and respected.

‘Tower of Words.’ Someone used to call me that. Listen to these: forlorn, lechery, scalp, lilt, catatonia, desolate, snowdrift, discourse. The magic of words, the way reality bends to them” (Anderson 14). This quotation while suggesting Fran had power over words, also engages with symbols of gender. The phrase ‘Tower of Words’ is from the Dylan Thomas poem “Especially When the October Wind”, about the power of poetry and the writing process. The poetic speaker in this poem turns nature into images and words through gendered personification. The phrase “tower of words” can be read as a Freudian phallic symbol, which sits in contrast to the “wordy shapes of women” and “star-gestured children” in the following lines.³⁴ This suggests language is being represented as divided between the male symbols of power, knowledge and creativity, and the female (associated with children and the heavens) emotional, spiritual, natural. By referencing this poem within her engagement with the power of words, Anderson is showing how literature, as written for example by male writers such as Heaney and Thomas, has turned woman into a symbolic object and reduced the female form through male subjectivity. Anderson notes how damaging words have been to Fran and how she subsequently learns to use words to empower herself:

I had only to say ‘Dissociate’ to myself and the imbecile faces of my teachers would shrink and recede. Words have power, and power was what I lacked. [...] I began to write. I was equal to it, although it was the hardest work I had ever done. In the solitude of my room, I summoned and dismissed presences at will. I overheard the thoughts of strangers. I unpoliced my memory, and it was as if I had died and could relive everything without pain. I knew I had found a way to rescue myself. (Anderson 14 & 15)

The phrase Fran uses, “the solitude of my room” recalls her earlier description of her room with the phrase “a room of one’s own”, which suggests Woolf’s views that women should write to create a positive image of and for women (Anderson 56). Anderson appears to be suggesting through Fran’s experiences that women can be abused by the male voice, that they have been “colonised” into believing male domination cannot be avoided. Fran however breaks free from this ideology to find her own voice and story.

Words, their gendered meaning and powerfulness, are at the centre of Fran’s relationship with Cornelius. Fran, who had created a physical safe space in her room, also attempts to turn her body into her refuge, when he forces his way into her room,

³⁴ These quotations were taken from a copy of this poem found on a poetry archive site at <<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/especially-when-the-october-wind/>>

making it a war zone of words: “He had invaded my refuge. I decided to make my body the still turning point of the world. I would be safe inside the ghetto of my own flesh. At once I felt stronger. His words started to bounce off me and fall dead in heaps” (Anderson 13). When Fran tapes Cornelius and plays his words back to him, he becomes angry, calls her a “filthy Irish white cow” and then moves from verbal to physical assaults. He abuses her body, bending her backwards over her knees in a submissive pose that dominates her with his physical strength. He voices his contempt at her weakness when he defines her as a “soft snivelling girl”, whom he could “crumple like paper” or rip apart (Anderson 14). Anderson sets up the binarisms of male/female, black/white, within the characters of Fran and Cornelius to break down expectations by showing the supposed powerless immigrant as the aggressor who uses racist terms toward the white woman. Fran defines his behaviour using the image of the coloniser: “it was the utter vacancy of my life that legitimises his colonisation of it” (Anderson 14). When she tries to use her words to gain freedom by speech and then writing a letter telling him he is no longer welcome, he forces his body upon her and rapes her. Anderson uses italics for the “love scene”, writing his abuse as if he were Fran’s lover, but at the same time using phrases that show the violence of the act and Fran’s trauma. This scene suggests a reversal of the trope of the colonised and coloniser. He is a “black Blade” filling her with “childhood darkness” and “nightmares” and when he is finished he suggests “no one can resist me”, which is both a threat of his superior strength and a parody of romantic literary notions that women cannot resist male seduction (Anderson 15,16). Anderson is engaging with the romantic genre’s responsibility for suggesting that women will succumb to male dominance and desire against their will:

If this were a piece of fiction, I would end it there on that teasingly ambiguous, faintly lyrical note. Same with a film. It would end with the crucified grateful grin of a fucked woman, as is expected. Or I could be blasphemous and let the camera spy on the man’s face. Yes, I would give you a vision of Lout at his manly exertions, his deep frown, his weighted lids, the charming flecks of spittle in the corners of his mouth. But this is real life. Reader, I didn’t marry him. (Anderson 16)

The woman is shown as the object of desire, needing to be tamed and subdued by the male. As Fran had stated earlier, a woman who did not fit within social roles, who is not the possession of a man, is an object free to be claimed by male desire. Fran is unable to prevent the assault on her “room”, her writing, or her body.

This idea echoes a scene in *To Stay Alive* where Rosaleen fears she will be raped and killed by the soldiers who threaten and assault her because they know her husband is now an imprisoned suspect:

She remembered seeing *Last Tango in Paris* in the university film club. Marlon Brando with his budding paunch and dirty raincoat just walks up to a stranger inspecting a flat for rent. Sticks it in her without preamble, and, of course, she loves it. Rolls on the floor in appreciation. His slave. His instrument. [...] Empties himself in a hole. 'I'm not a hole,' Rosaleen told herself (Anderson 184-5)

Sex therefore can be used as a weapon and Anderson highlights the power of negative words and images by considering how a film can portray women as an empty hole (evoking Sartre again), which provokes Rosaleen toward seeing the danger in allowing her emotions to become disconnected from her body; in doing so, she is connecting with death. At this point Rosaleen chooses to re-connect with life and try to create a future for her baby. Fran also tries to empower the female body by mocking the negative use of the mothering depicted in male psychoanalytical theory. She draws Cornelius as a child needing to suckle from her breast:

Empty sockets where the eyes should be. Elongated swollen lips battening on to a deflated breast. Droplets of milk splattering his chin. Suddenly I laughed freely for the first time in months. He was nothing but a babymouth yearning for the nearest suckle! (Anderson 15)

By removing the eyes he has lost the power of the male gaze and Fran feels empowered to begin writing. Anderson is thus suggesting that women reclaim their bodies from the male writers who have used them, invading their meanings for use as metaphors in their writing to produce imagery that is negative for women. In this description it is the man who becomes infantilised and reduced to a powerless trope.³⁵ In this way Anderson is exploring the power relationships within the gendering of bodies and engages with current feminist theory on women in literature. She is showing in these examples the power of words and symbols, which can become harmful in their representation of women and demonstrates the need to engage with negative images and tropes of gender as she has done within her writing.

³⁵ The other image drawn by Fran in this scene is of a mother giving birth from her anus, which taken alongside the above mentioned image, would suggest a reference to Julia Kristeva's discussions on "semiotic discourse" and the male *jouissances* whereby they retain their subconscious connection to the mother.

Anderson explores the power of language and how the written word may be either negatively used against women, or reclaimed by women to bring a positive understanding of the female body and subjectivity. She suggests that having a male-only canon is destructive toward women's sense of self and shows Fran reading books by women to gain a positive image for her daughter. Dominic, whose very name suggests his role as the dominator, represents the patriarchal law of the father who as "Professor of English Literature [is] always leavening his conversation with bits of remembered poetry" (Anderson 23).³⁶ In chapter eleven Dominic describes his academic colleague Nigel as a "Bloody reactionary Leavisite" (Anderson 86). This aligns both men with F.R. Leavis, who is known for his canonical creation in *The Great Tradition* and emphasises Dominic's positioning of himself as a literary patriarch towards Fran. She describes herself as "held hostage" in his study and considers he is turning her "room of her own" into a locked space: "'Don't you have plenty of leisure? A room of Your Own? A little Life of Your Own?' Yes. Yes. So did Bertha Rochester" (Anderson 56). Dominic tries to take control by enforcing his reading of Fran and Caroline upon their lives. This is emphasised by Anderson writing the next chapter from his point of view, which depicts Dominic's misunderstanding of Fran and his attempt to turn her into his possession:

Yes, he had cast out Impotence in all its forms. Even his Writing Block was chipped; a couple of extra shoves (when he had time) would shatter it completely. A novel was unfurling itself in his head, a novel about a university professor with a wife, a live-in lover, several live-out lovers, and two children, one of whom was mysteriously, wonderfully and topically black. A little changeling, corporal signal of the professor's own protean soul. (Anderson 64)

Anderson depicts Dominic's claiming of Emily for his own child as the aggressive British male coloniser taking possession of the disempowered Irish female. She shows him singing Jerusalem while dreaming of how he will "train" Fran to take his penis as if it were the Host (Anderson 66). Fran starts to free herself from this influence by becoming closer to Caroline. She sees her "surrogate wifeness" as unfair to both women and to Emily, so she moves into an all-women house where they take turns looking after each other's children. By taking action, Fran is taking back control of her own life story and that of her daughter by giving her positive female role-models.

³⁶ Dominic is more common as a Catholic name and would therefore complicate his role in their relationship as he would be the Catholic other to her Protestantism. This is particularly significant when considered in the light of his imagining his colonial authority over her body during his 'Jerusalem' dream.

Anderson shows how women writing in their own voice are important for other women writers and readers. Fran's pregnancy could be read as a metaphor for the birthing or creating of literature, which Anderson acknowledges needs a female canon for guidance: "I needed knowledge, assistance, hands to hold me in the spasms of birth, hands to coax her out of me" (Anderson 22). Fran equates herself at this time with Emily Bronte, whom she considers as unknowable behind what has been ascribed to her actions by others. Fran sees in Emily Bronte a reflection of herself, which influenced her decision to call her own creation/baby after her: "My child, my little black Celt, would be called Emily. With that name I wanted to confer on her power and truthfulness, the strength to follow beauty" (Anderson 25). Anderson is suggesting as she does with the ending of the novel that women need one another: to successfully create, women need and depend on other women. Caroline and Fran are important to one another as Fran needs Caroline to help her overcome her past traumas and Caroline needs Fran's support in her current difficult home life where she is unhappy in her role of wife and mother. Fran suggests that Caroline, "had a refreshing way of short-circuiting my bad memories" and she also gives Fran financial security, something which Caroline never had for herself beyond what her father or husband provided for her (Anderson 47). In this way it is the relationship of other women that helps Fran to move beyond her inabilities, to create a positive new sense of herself in her post-trauma period.

Conclusion

When Fran meets Paul in "Strangers" the final chapter of *Cuckoo*, he appears as if from a dream like a ghost from her past, which thereby suggests the return of her trauma. Fran is walking through a charred and barren area, surrounded by soldiers and fences, which are images that are connected to the tropes of war in general and also to Fran's personal memories of Northern Ireland. She keeps repeating phrases such as "better leave soon", "better go back" and dreams up a nostalgic vision of home that bears little resemblance to her real family home (Anderson 152, 153). Fran has returned to the trauma of her lost home and she finds herself returning to her losses as the dead and missing bodies are once again encountered: "Suddenly I stopped dead. Paul", embodied within Paul as a "gatecrashing ghost" from her past (Anderson 152). His leaving repeated the pattern of loss with Nick and therefore is connected in Fran with her encounter with death. She was left once again not knowing what had happened to the

missing body: “you said that the worst thing about separation from someone you loved ... from someone important ... was not the loss of their presence but not knowing what was happening to them. Their absence became a space filled with fear” (Anderson 157). Fran’s lack of knowing has trapped her in the past and made her unable to engage with her future. Paul’s leaving becomes another traumatic gap of unknowing, another missing body. Fran’s enforced abortion and the reason for Paul’s fear of fatherhood, which led to his attempted suicide were not discussed; instead he walked out leaving gaps where his things used to be in their flat, as symbols of the loss of family life. Paul explains to Fran: “I was cold and brutal. I cursed myself when I instigated that murder. I couldn’t have a child [...] or a wife” (Anderson 159). Fran now knows the important missing elements within the story of her life with Paul and she is able to understand more about the ending of their relationship; however, although they reconcile and forgive the past, Fran is left with the question, “But don’t I exist?” (Anderson 160) In the telling of the story Paul leaves Fran out of the narrative, it was his guilt, his trauma, his choices. Although trauma has been established as a connecting factor in both their past lives, the two characters remain separated and ultimately do not comprehend each other’s traumas or their own position with respect to the other’s trauma. Anderson ends with the phrase, “I rose and without another word walked back to the women” (Anderson 160). Fran is walking away from this encounter with her past with many questions answered, but there are indications that she will now need to incorporate her new understanding of the past into her history and that the trauma will remain, as she remains, with many questions still unanswered: for Fran and for the reader, much of her story is still unknown.

Anderson’s writing focuses first and foremost on the traumatic encounter of individuals and nations with death. She connects trauma and death to gender and sexuality and also to the crisis of national identity. Anderson engages with imagery that has been used by other authors as for example when, like Madden, she also considers birds as a trope for gender and trauma and when, like Beckett, she explores the image of Mother Ireland as a metaphor for national consciousness. She writes mainly within the context of Northern Ireland’s Troubles to explore the way that civil war changes relationships and individuals. De Beauvoir acknowledges that the historical events during which her writing was conceived, the Second World War, the German occupation of Paris, the Cold War and the Algerian War, were all part of her story (Fallaise 4). Anderson’s writing is similarly shaped by the traumatic war zone of the Troubles and by the world

events of the Cold War and the Civil Rights movements. Anderson's repetition of key themes throughout her novels and her stories explores the return of repressed traumas and how the body can play an important role in interpreting trauma. By applying Caruth's work on trauma it is possible to see how the experience of trauma is both belated and physical and how trauma is founded in the gap of knowing the moment of death. The main characters in *To Stay Alive* are trapped, suffocating in the midst of a situation that denies them objectivity from their trauma and while they remain in the site of their trauma they cannot escape their fixation and fear of death. In *Cuckoo* Anderson removes her characters from the place of trauma, but has an encounter with the fear of death that resurrects the emotional memories of the trauma. In this space Fran is able to explore her trauma and understand its role in her life. None of Anderson's characters suggest there can be a 'healing' from trauma, but there are indications that a new life can be found that incorporates the realities of the past into the present in a way that allows the individual to build a positive future. Caruth's work also shows how individuals, although separated from the knowledge of death and trauma, may be able to empathise with another individual's trauma through an understanding of the unknowability: by sharing their stories it is possible to witness to another's trauma. This is borne out in Anderson's novels, as several characters share their individual traumas in ways that demonstrate empathetic understanding. The destructive results of trauma need not isolate an individual, nor negate their future.

Chapter Four: Deirdre Madden and Jennifer Johnston Contrasting Traumatic Memory of the 1980s and 1990s.

Introduction to the Chapter

Jennifer Johnston and Deirdre Madden were writing their novels during the height of the Troubles and their work engages with this context by examining the impact of a prolonged period of loss, grief and violence, by suggesting how trauma returns to haunt future generations. The beginning of the 1980s heralded over a decade of bombings, murders, beatings, and segregation. The H-Block protests had developed into the hunger strikes, which culminated in the 1981 death of Bobby Sands, subsequent rioting, and the Enniskillen bomb, thus defining this decade as the “darkest and most traumatic period of the troubles” (McKitterick and McVea 173). During this time Irish studies began exploring Anglo-Irish relationships within a modern framework, which included postcolonialism.³⁷ The two writers focused upon in this chapter echo this exploration of the colonial in their writing. Johnston’s *The Invisible Worm* (1991) and Madden’s *The Birds of the Innocent Woods* (1988)³⁸ create a convergence of social and individual traumas to comment upon historical incidents by exploring how tropes of the colonial past remain as scars in the social psyche. Their writing explores Irish female identity within a contemporary setting that re-writes the Big House genre. This genre of writing utilises the tropes of Irish Gothic literature to explore the political, social and religious divisions created by British colonialism during the Ascendancy. These writers take different paths to draw a self-conscious trope of the Big House and expose the role it plays in today’s political and literary spaces. Both authors use the Big House genre to highlight the oppression of women; it is not just national trauma, but women’s trauma at the heart of these novels. Johnston attempts a correlation between the traumatic memories of her two protagonists in *Invisible Worm*, which breaks down iconic gendered images and explores the difficulties of narrating trauma. Madden’s *Birds* utilises a cross-generational story to explore the trauma and identity crisis in postcolonial Ireland by focusing on the microcosm of two interwoven families and the ramifications of hidden family trauma for present and future generations. She does so

³⁷ Seamus Deane (1994), for example, suggested that Ireland’s traditional image was born from the ‘othering’ of the island in comparison to its colonial English counterpart.

³⁸ Hereafter this novel shall be referred to as *Bird’s*.

by deploying aspects of the uncanny and tropes associated with doubling. Examining these novels alongside one another within their literary and political context, Madden shows how they use the Gothic and Big House genre to facilitate an engagement with memory and trauma in the context of the Troubles.

Johnston and Madden engage with two different forms of trauma: the ongoing fissures of the Troubles as they affect the characters in the present day settings, and the hidden trauma of the colonial past as it re-surfaces in the modern psyche. These are powerful forces moulding the lives of the people portrayed and the two novelists use a variety of techniques to explore the impact of traumas on the individual within a society in crisis. Madden and Johnston dismantle their protagonist's internal universes through the course of their novels, giving prominence to the writing or creating of the self through signification. The protagonist's early childhood traumas are depicted as a break in their identity, which necessitates a formal reconstruction of the past in adulthood. The authors experiment with a multitude of voices, all of which refuse to conform to the feminised and domesticated image assigned to women by societal stereotypes. Identity has many roles to fulfil within the dynamic political arena of Northern Ireland. The style and content of their writing breaks with traditional expectations and in doing so allows for new concepts of gender, political, and religious roles during these decades. As Richard Kirkland points out in *Identity Parades*, identity "mediates our personal memory in terms of collective inheritance and provides the platform from which we launch ourselves" (Kirkland 1). The problematic of cultural identity in the six counties magnifies the quest for self-identity. Madden and Johnston suggest a connection between postcolonial recovery and individual trauma stories: the trauma of colonialism, which includes the history of loss of language, culture, land, emigration and the Famine, remains as a scar for future generations. In this analysis tropes such as doubling and incest are utilised as metaphors for the effects of trauma on social memory.

Both Madden and Johnston critically engage with explorations of Ireland as a postcolonial country. Madden suggests that the colonial past remains in repressed memories that are spilling forth into the new generation. She engages with critics such as Deane (1994, 1997) by exploring the postcolonial framework for Irish history. She points to the romanticised vision of Ireland created in the literature of the previous generation, thus critiquing this idealism with her unusual use of gothic literary tropes. In particular Madden utilises the double in a complex interweaving of characters, objects

and plot, as a metaphor of a fragmented psyche and as the image of a post-traumatic narrative of the past. Johnston similarly suggests that the traumas of the past remain buried, but still accessible and damaging to those who are living through the Troubles. She fragments her protagonist's narrative, meshing it with the story of another character, but leaving gaps within the narrative to expose the problems of telling trauma and of bearing witness to the traumas of others. Johnston and Madden reference the position of women in these decades, and although neither author directly engages with specific traumas of the Northern Irish Troubles in these particular novels, it exists as the ghostly trauma behind their narratives. The hauntings of the past are captured within the tropes to explore how history influences identities in crisis through its seepage into modern life.

Madden, Johnston and the Big House

The Big House novel in generic terms has a tendency to move toward Gothic conventions to explore colonialism. Issues of inheritance express the fear of displacement, issues of patrimony and the dispossession of an illegitimate society (Kreilkamp 69). Irish Gothic directly confronts issues of translation and decoding to show that there is more than one narrative of the past. Siobhan Kilfeather notes that after the Irish Civil War, Gothic writing was entwined with the Big House genre to describe the suppressed horrors of the Emergency when images of the war, particularly of the camps, were censored. Kilfeather sees Gothic in Irish literature as an alternative exploration of cultural anxieties and the repetitive nature of history, "which questions official sources, excavates guilty secrets and pulls skeletons from the closet" (Kilfeather 83). In an essay on Scottish and Irish Gothic, David Punter notes how both cultures use the Gothic as a way of looking at the destabilisation of national identity. He notes how the Gothic preoccupation with ruins and monuments suggests an uneasy relationship with the past:

Both of these notions, I believe, point us toward the "uncanny" in that they speak always of history, [...] in specific modes of ghostly persistence which may occur when, particularly in Scotland and Ireland, national aspirations are thwarted by conquest or by settlement, as they have been so often. (Punter 105)

Monuments become part of the national landscape and place a public comment on what may be individual experiences. In this way the Big House as it exists in physical form in

Ireland is a site of traumatic memory: the landed Estates remain as places associated with loss of land, loss of language and culture, and colonial dominance.

The symbolic significance of the estates of the Ascendancy has remained an important feature on the Irish landscape and in the literary representation of Irish history. The Big House genre has existed in Irish literature for several centuries and is mainly seen as the work of female writers. In *The Field Day Anthology II* (1991) McCormack suggests how “Irish concern with the ‘Big House’ as a political microcosm was initiated by Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent*” and was taken up as a theme in subsequent Irish women’s gothic writing (McCormack: Deane et al 832).³⁹ Revising the Big House as a fictional setting becomes a tool for examining the psychological, the social, the political and the theological, as for example in Caroline Blackwood’s *Great Granny Webster* (1977). Claire Hughes suggests: “[the] Irish Big House novel from the late nineteenth century to the work of Keane, John Banville and Jennifer Johnston today, has found a form of Gothic, both comic and tragic, which is an objective correlative for the century’s social and political confusions” (Hughes 120). As she notes Johnston’s use of the Big House is not merely a depiction of a historical landscape, but an exploration of how this iconic past remains in contemporary physical and psychic landscapes. This remains true for Irish writers in general but writers from the post-Partition North use the Big House in a different way to the rest of Ireland in that it has come to symbolise the continuing colonial issues specific to Northern Ireland. Vera Kreilkamp suggests that modern writers view the Big House as a shared historical background:

No longer viewed solely as the symbol of oppression and privilege or, alternatively, as the site of order and discipline in an uncivilised colony or disintegrating world, the Protestant Big House now represents part of a shared heritage in a nation that is recreating and rethinking its past. (Kreilkamp, 1998, 196)

It is not, as Kreilkamp suggests a shared background that all classes in Ireland can relate to, but one which is solely the inheritance of the privileged few and their staff. The Big House therefore remains a symbol of English power, which is a useful metaphor for colonial continuance in Ulster and as such is a physical site of historical trauma. In “Colonial Trauma/Postcolonial Recovery?” (2000) David Lloyd’s diverse readings of the colonial past and its effects on contemporary Ireland, suggest that there remain

³⁹ Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800) created a humorous pattern of religious and class divisions, which Molly Keane, Edith Somerville and Elizabeth Bowen expand into a nostalgic view.

several forms of memory continually vying to transform history for various political purposes. Lloyd suggests that colonial trauma creates a new sense of self and community so that aspects of postcolonial cultural rebuilding are expressed in similar ways to individual post-traumatic experiences; something has been lost (Lloyd 215). Lloyd's theory can be applied to Madden and Johnston's explorations of fragmented memory and identity. It is no longer the traumatic event itself (as for example the famine) that is important but what it has come to signify for the public and how it remains in the social memory.

Madden and Johnston use the symbol of the house in different ways. Johnston's writing depicts how Big House fiction, which traditionally incorporates the sense of decay and horror within Gothic literature, frequently uses the house as a metaphor for the dying out of the Anglo-Irish or Protestant Ascendancy. Gothic fiction returns to the symbol of the haunted and decaying house both as a place of entrapment and as a site for the disturbed psyche, thus suggesting a troubled history for its inhabitants. To keep its history alive, the women in Johnston's novel *The Invisible Worm* become entrapped in the house, as if in a living museum: they are as much objects of the past as the rooms filled with relics. The house becomes a memorial, a site of memory to the political and social traumas of Irish history. Laura, who has inherited her mother's house and is charged with keeping the memories of the house alive, discovers that her loving care for the past includes her own destruction. This opens up a new way of viewing the house and her family, and she realises that the past must be purged. The house is a place of pain because it is the site of the trauma and therefore holds no hope for the future. In this novel the House becomes both the victim and the perpetrator of trauma. It suffers from the neglect of its inhabitants, while demanding a high price from those who inherit responsibility for its existence. In metaphorical terms, the house as representative of the Ascendancy, has no part in the New Ireland and can only hope to pass on some small memories of its history to those who are willing to listen. Alternatively, in *Birds* Madden utilises setting, less as the personification of the trauma, and more for its uncanny connection with interweaving family relationships. The family homes of her two main protagonists are destroyed through fires, which leaves the girls as young orphans and their vulnerable isolation opens them up to incestuous relationships. The home in Madden thus signifies a lost childhood and the physical house is the burnt out ruin in the distant landscape, which is reminiscent of the end of the colonial power of the Ascendancy. Madden connects to the trauma of the colonial scars created by the

Ascendancy, but without the nostalgic sense of the loss of history which other writers including Johnston, have produced. Instead Madden shows the house, or home as something inherited or lost, and those who are connected to its history are associated with repressed traumas, which become poisonous to subsequent generations.

There are several recurring themes and tropes used in the *Big House* novel, which in a similar form to the Gothic novel, explores the psychological impact of trauma. As Markman Ellis notes, the Gothic *Big House* genre is associated with repressed memories, emotions, and hidden traumas:

Some of the structural assumptions and key terms of value of psychoanalysis (the uncanny, the unconscious, repression) are predicated on, determined by, or theorised in the discourse of gothic fiction, with its secret family histories, curtained recesses, subterranean passages, and dingy vaulted dungeons. (Ellis 13)

Both Johnston and Madden incorporate incest as a main theme in their novels, but whereas Johnston focuses it's use on her protagonist's recovery of her trauma, Madden shows how it's repression can be traced through several generations to the first Ascendancy member of the family. The Gothic fiction of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries uses incest as a defining moment to capture the horror of what was perceived as a threat against nature, morality and society.⁴⁰ Incest tends to involve a father-figure (blood relative or ward), thus commenting on the abuse of patriarchal power over women, in a society where women had little financial or legal independence. Sibling incest was less frequently depicted but where it did occur it was most often through lack of knowledge of bloodlines, or from over-familiarisation in the aristocracy.⁴¹ Both of these forms are explored in these novels, and Madden does so through the use of doubles: incest is a gothic terror that amplifies the sibling doubling and points to the issues of identity, inheritance and bloodlines. Patricia Coughlan focuses on the role of the double for exploring the internal-self by highlighting how it may hold the knowledge or morality not available to the other:

[A] character encounters a person exactly resembling him, but apparently with another quite independent existence [...] for instance in the case of the

⁴⁰ There are many examples of tyrant fathers, uncles, guardians, brothers and close relatives who imprison the heroine and attempt to force marriage or sexual relations, such as the incestuous Gothic found in Walpole's *The Mysterious Mother*, and Lewis's *The Monk*.

⁴¹ Until the mid-nineteenth century it was permissible for filial marriages to be performed in British colonies to protect financial assets, although the marriage would be annulled on any return to England.

conscience-double, which accuses and retributively hangs about the protagonist. (Coughlan 28)

The subject requires a fragmentation to occur when the self is disturbed by a crisis of conscience or moral dilemma. As Coughlan goes on to say this is a permanent splitting, “whether by wickedness, or suffering, or as a result of a moment of inattention to some social or moral taboo, the self may undergo a process of fragmentation, and be ever after impossible to reunify” (Coughlan 29). The concept of a self under a tremendous psychological strain that creates a fracture would be in keeping with the moral dilemma created by the incest taboo, a taboo that Freud has singled out as significantly upheld through all cultures and times. The trauma of such digression would be increased with the circumstances created in Madden’s novel; the sudden unveiling of the secret patrimony that lead to the complicity of the self in breaking the incest taboo.

Madden and Johnston develop very different fragmentation of characters; Johnston’s protagonists Laura and Dominic create a bond to uncover their traumatic pasts, whereas Madden uses doubling in mirrors, objects, and other characters to exorcise the repressed traumas of Jane, Ellen, and James; Catherine, Peter and Sarah; and Ellen and James’ parents and their grandparents. Doubling in characters is a well-known trope for the exploration of identity, particularly within Gothic literature. The double is a type of shadow-self which, in its original form could not be seen by people or in the mirror; it was considered bad luck if this dark other became visible. Madden’s creation of a doppelganger occurs after a particular scene using a mirror and therefore points towards the unveiling of the dark secrets within the family. The double was frequently used in literature as a signal of imminent death and has also been used in literature as an expression of Christian self-scrutiny, thus making it important for novels with a moral imperative.⁴² It was traditionally used for exorcising guilt, thus allowing the individuals to continue living questionably immoral lives while the alienated or guilty self is placed outside the conscious subject, as a mirror image of the self. The double was a common feature of Irish folklore where it appeared as a supernatural apparition or an actual double of a living person and tended to appear just before a death. The use of birds in Madden’s novel could be seen as a further exorcising of the character’s guilt upon creatures with mystic powers as birds are associated with the souls of the dead. The double has been explored in texts associated with the Big House or hyphenated Anglo-

⁴² Hogg’s *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* is an example of an exploration of Protestant religious beliefs.

Irish culture where it becomes an important trope for the postcolonial fragmentation of identity between the displaced coloniser, who does not appear to be at home either in Ireland or in England, and a colonised Other divided through the imposition of a bi-lingual culture.⁴³ Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* for example examines the crisis of his main character firstly by the visible doubling of the protagonist with his picture, but also by exposing the fluidity of commonly held characteristics between the three male characters: although separate individuals, they uncannily overlap in physical and psychological aspects.⁴⁴ This is very similar to the four female characters in *Birds* who although remarkably alike, are also opposites in personality. Johnston also shows how her characters, although appearing in binary opposition, create fluidity to allow for re-connection. In contemporary literature the double can appear as a deliberate division of the self to avoid emotional pain, yet it remains in the narrative to haunt the second self. Therefore the double can be seen as a way of writing about hidden traumas, showing how the characters are suffering from repressed memories, or re-occurrence of generational traumas. Doubling in character, theme, and plot is thus particularly important when exploring issues to do with Irish history, memory and trauma.

Jennifer Johnston: An Introduction to the Author

Jennifer Prudence Johnston was born in Dublin in 1930 to Protestant parents who were well-known in the Irish theatre. Her mother Shelagh Richards was an actress and her father was Dennis Johnston, a playwright who had worked with Yeats, Shaw and O'Casey.⁴⁵ Her parents separated when Johnston was eight and she lived with her mother and brother in the top half of a house they shared with her godfather. In a piece about her childhood for *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Girl* (1986) Johnston describes how she spent most of her time with Nono, her nanny, "who looked after all our wants and wishes and kept us safe from our parents and our parents safe from us" (Johnston: Quinn 51). The other major influence in her early years was their housekeeper May, a Dublin Catholic whose extended family became close to Johnston. Although she comes from a Church of Ireland background, Johnston states that she was "fairly indifferent to religion as a child" and has remained so throughout her life (Johnston: Quinn 52, Johnston: Wachtel 322). She went to Park House School, took

⁴³ Twins have previously appeared in the Big House genre in John Banville's *Birchwood* (1973), which has many overlaps with Madden's *Birds*.

⁴⁴ Terry Eagleton's essay on Oscar Wilde (1995) explores Wilde's complicated position towards the Ascendancy.

⁴⁵ He also worked as a lawyer and received an OBE for his work as a war correspondent.

dance lessons at the Abbey School of Ballet, and entered Trinity College Dublin to study English but left after failing her first year (although she was later awarded an honorary DLitt degree in 2001). She describes her time at university as “peculiar”, filled with ex-servicemen, who seemed “both glamorous and dangerous” (Johnston: Quinn 58). Johnston married the lawyer Ian Smyth in 1951 and spent a year in Paris while Smyth was working for a film company before moving to London. Johnston had four children before divorcing Smyth in 1974 and marrying the solicitor David Gilliland in 1976. The couple moved back to Ireland and are living in Brook Hall, Gilliland’s family home in Derry/Londonderry. In 1993 Johnston spent time working with prisoners in the Maze H-Block, Long Kesh. She has also served on the boards of Dublin’s Abbey Theatre and Belfast’s Lyric Theatre and is a member of the Aosdána (people of the arts).⁴⁶ Johnston donated her papers to Trinity College Library in November 2000.

Johnston has an impressive eighteen novels to date: *The Captains and the Kings* (1972), *The Gates* (1973), *How Many Miles to Babylon?* (1974), *Shadows on Our Skin* (1977), *The Old Jest* (1979), *The Christmas Tree* (1981), *The Railway Station Man* (1985), *Fool’s Sanctuary* (1988), *The Invisible Worm* (1992), *The Illusionist* (1995), *Two Moons* (1998), *The Gingerbread Woman* (2000), *This is Not a Novel* (2002), *Grace and Truth* (2005), *Foolish Mortals* (2007), *Truth or Fiction* (2009), *Shadowstory* (2011) and *A Sixpenny Song* (2013). She has also written a number of plays including *The Nightingale and Not the Lark* (1979), *Indian Summer* (1983), *The Porch* (1986), *The Desert Lullaby* (1996) which premiered at the Lyric Theatre in Belfast on October 1996, and *The Invisible Man* (1997) which was launched in April 1997 at the New York Irish Repertory Theatre. A stage version of *How Many Miles to Babylon?* premiered at the Lyric Theatre in September 1994. Johnston has written several short stories that have been included in collections and anthologies. Most recently she was a contributor to Dermot Bolger's *Finbar’s Hotel* (1997).⁴⁷ Her short story “The Theft”, which was included in Joseph Hone’s *Irish Ghost Stories* (1977) and David Marcus’ *Irish Ghost Stories* (1999), describes the day when a young girl meets her ghostly doppelganger who haunts her throughout her life until she returns to her ancestral home. Johnston’s story “Trio” is included in Kathleen Walsh D’Arcy, Louis DeSalvo and Katherine Hogan’s *Territories of the Voice: Contemporary Stories by Irish Women* (1989) and

⁴⁶ Aosdána was created in 1981 by the Arts Council of Ireland and consists of 250 elected members. Other famous Irish writers include Samuel Beckett, Seamus Heaney and Brian Friel.

⁴⁷ This is a collection of stories set in the same hotel written by the multiple author’s in a collaboration that does not separate which part was written by which author.

Peter Haining's *Great Irish Stories of Murder and Mystery* (1999) and focuses on two men preparing to murder an Irish businessman. Johnston also contributed "Charming Red Brick Residence" (an extract from her novel *The Illusionist*) to Siobhán Parkinson's *Home: An Anthology of Modern Irish Writing* (1996), which invited authors to reflect on the concept of 'home' in support of the homeless charity Focus Point Ireland. Johnston is one of the few women writers to be included in Seamus Deane's original three volumes of *The Field Day Anthology*.

Johnston has given several interviews throughout her career, which have been illuminating about her work. Richard York's interview "A Daft Way to Earn a Living': Jennifer Johnston and the Writer's Art" in Lazenblatt's *Northern Narratives* considers how she perceives her writing as a "jigsaw puzzle of time and story and emotion" as well as describing her continuing love of the theatre, how it influences the way she writes monologues for her characters, how she plays with fracturing time using film flashback techniques and the way she sees "everything in a very visual way when I'm writing [...] almost like a film camera" (York: Lazenblatt 29, 40, 38). From early childhood the theatre has played a large part in Johnston's life. She played a page to her mother's Joan in Shaw's *St. Joan* at Dublin's Olympia Theatre in 1943. Johnston initially wanted to follow her mother into the theatre and often watched her mother's rehearsals: "I was steeped in theatre, and it seemed like that was where I had to go" (Johnston: Wachtel 322). Her first piece of writing was a play which was read by her mother's agent who directed her into novel writing.⁴⁸ She describes how spoken words take on a different quality so that poetry, plays and Church of Ireland liturgy can give power and "magnificence" to words, turning them into "word paintings" (Johnston: Wachtel 329). This may explain why so many of her characters overlay their dialogue with short excerpts from other sources that they use like weapons at times of stress or difficulty. A further theatrical influence in her life was her school teacher who ran the small preparatory school she attended for fourteen years from the age of three.

Miss Phail was a most enlightened woman and a very literary person. She was very friendly with the Synges and the Yeatses, so all her classes were permeated with a slightly romantic 'celtic twilight' aura. She introduced us to the great artists and the great composers. [...] She tried to turn us into liberal thinking people. (Johnston: Quinn 54)

⁴⁸ <http://www.londonderrysentinel.co.uk/news/local-news/why-jennifer-johnston-will-never-quit-writing-1-2142324>

This is an interesting influence on Johnston, which finds echoes in novels such as *Two Moons*.

Johnston has won many awards throughout her career including the Whitbread Book Award in 1979 for her novel *The Old Jest* (1979), which was made into the film *The Dawning* (1988).⁴⁹ Johnston was also short listed for the 1977 Orange Booker Prize for her novel *Shadows on Our Skin* (1977) and was given the Irish Book Lifetime Achievement Award in 2012. She was awarded the Robert Pitman Award (1972), the *Yorkshire Post* Fiction Prize (1972), the Author's Club First Novel (1973), the Whitbread Book Award (1979), the Giles Cooper Award for best Radio play (1989), the *Daily Express* Best Book Award (1992), and the Irish PEN Award (2006). Due to the sheer volume of her writing there have been numerous reviews of her work, which in the main have been very complimentary. Johnston has noted that her novels are very popular and that most people in Ireland have read *How Many Miles to Babylon?* or *Shadows on Our Skin* as these have been on the school curriculum.⁵⁰ She suggests however that she is less well read in America as the publishing companies do not perceive her as an Irish writer because she does not fit into traditional patterns of writing (York: Lazenblatt 44). For this reason she is less understood by her contemporaries who dismiss her style and lack of political details. She states with some humour that:

good middle-class worthy people tell me my books are very depressing [...] I find that in fact it is the younger writers in Ireland who understand what I'm writing about, rather than the ones of my own generation, who dismiss me totally as 'Big House writer' [...] and they are not actually understanding what I'm at [...] all these men who just thought I was writing romantic novels, you know, and I haven't been. (Johnston in York: Lazenblatt 43)

Johnston is highlighting the need to look closely at her writing to understand the concepts behind her use of the Big House genre as a means of accessing contemporary issues. Critics have concentrated on her writing style, particularly her use of dialogue, and point to her theatrical background as a possible influence on the way she structures her work; for example Bridget O'Toole in *Across a Roaring Hill* (1985) argues that, "her economy of detail results in a certain nakedness in the drama between characters" (O'Toole: Dawes and Longley 135). Her prose is compact and filled with fragments of

⁴⁹ Directed by Robert Knights, Produced by Sarah Lawson and starring Anthony Hopkins, Hugh Grant, Jean Simmons and Trevor Howard.

⁵⁰ *ibid*

references to other artistic works, particularly songs and music. From her earliest novels she has experimented with language, using ironic nostalgia, and fragmenting or defamiliarising techniques.

Johnston has too many critical works focusing on her writing to list here in this short biography. The critical reception of Johnston's work has focused mainly on her early novels, thus leading to her label as a Big House writer, as for example Masaru Sekine's *Irish Writers and Society at Large* (1985), which places her in the tradition of Anglo-Irish novelists such as Maria Edgeworth and Molly Keane (Burleigh 1). Many other critics have drawn similar comparisons, as for example Sean McMahon in "Anglo-Irish Attitudes: The Novels of Jennifer Johnston" (1975), Mark Mortimer in "The World of Jennifer Johnston: A Look at Three Novels" (1980), Vera Kreilkamp in *The Anglo-Irish Novel and the Big House* (1998), Waffia Mursi in "The Big House in Mahfouz's *The Countdown* and Jennifer Johnston's *Fool's Sanctuary*" (1996), and Jacqueline Genet in *The Big House In Ireland* (1991). Perhaps the best known of Johnston's Big House critics is Rüdger Imhof whose essay "'A Little Bit of Ivory, Two Inches Wide': The Small World of Jennifer Johnston's Fiction" (1985) set the tone for critical analysis of her early work when he drew a comparison between her and Austen's private world of the gentry. Although some critics such as Kennedy-Andrews have continued to contain Johnston's writing in this way, most contemporary critics have begun exploring how Johnston is working against the traditions of Big House literature. For example Kreilkamp argues that Johnston plays with the symbol of the house using it as a microcosm to "negotiate the fusion of the psychological with the political" (Kreilkamp 202).

Christine Hunt Mahony's *Contemporary Irish Literature: Transforming Tradition* (1998) suggests that Johnston's earliest three Big House novels, *The Captain and the Kings* (1972), *The Gates* (1973) and *How Many Miles to Babylon?* (1974) are her most successful and she argues that Johnston's revisiting of themes throughout her novels has expanded an understanding of her writing:

Johnston's oeuvre is, despite gender focus and settings that range from the period of World War I to today's Ireland, very tightly cohesive. Her plots share pulse points, her characters share traits, and through these multiple referents the novelist has been able to explore time and again similar thematic issues to resonant effect as her body of work grows. (Mahony 220)

Mahony highlights the importance of gender politics behind Johnston's writing and notes how she strives to contextualise the character's experiences and choices within their specific time and space. She argues that Johnston's protagonists break down the male and female divide so that the focus is not on an idealised private domestic space, but an exploration of art and identity. "Frequently Johnston's protagonists, male or female, have artistic inclinations or ambitions, usually not fully realised" (Mahony 220). It is this quest for self-realisation and expression that unites Johnston's characters, despite their differences in age, class, gender, or generational timeframes. Mahony notes that both *The Invisible Worm* and *The Illusionist* appear initially as novels about personal relationships at times of crisis that open up to show a wider exploration of Irish politics, which often suggests how the social world impacts upon the individual and vice versa.

Johnston's central characters struggle to survive despite challenges that are often cruel, senseless, and casually accidental. Her imaginative world is a dangerous place under its posh surface, and her characters develop surprising degrees of resilience to overcome the dangers they face. Johnston opts for the human spirit in all cases, but her thematic conclusions are far from naive. (Mahony 225)

Mahony sees what other critics have neglected, that Johnston strives to work on multiple levels to explore both individual and social maladies to enable an understanding of the self within the context of both historical influences and contemporary issues.

David Burleigh also moves away from focusing on the themes of Big House and war to consider the rich layers that Johnston's stylistics add to her novel. He applauds her "restrained and precisely factual" style, her ability to capture characters and to evoke a strong sense of place, and her use of dialogue:

Refrains from nursery rhymes, or songs, or poems [...] add a special cadence, a poetic and legendary quality, to the stories. Johnston also frequently uses the presence of birds as a counterpart to a happening or a conversation. Crows stirring in trees, pigeons on a windowsill, swans over a lake, a seagull on a roof - sometimes they move with events, but more often, they are indifferent. (Burleigh 7)

Like many Irish writers, including Madden, Johnston has chosen to use images such as birds as a way of signalling moods, emotions and opening up references in similar ways to her use of songs, which work like short-hand to create new meanings behind her

dialogue. Johnston prefers to show and suggest rather than tell the reader her intentions, which allows for an emotional depth within her characters. The subject matters that Johnston chooses are not easy to explore but her use of tools that are more often found in poetry or drama sets her apart from her contemporaries, and enables the reader to access traumatic experiences. Johnston is creating in her sequence of novels, spaces and times in Irish history that continue to influence identity and nationhood. She frequently chooses to blend her male and female protagonists, interweaving their thoughts and stories through one another. In a similar way she does not suggest a private world as separate from the patriarchal political, but instead shows the destructive nature of violence upon all aspects of life for both her male and female characters. By considering these novels through the lens of trauma theory, it is possible to perform a very different interpretation of Johnston's writing, which illuminates her techniques when engaging with post traumatised identities.

Jennifer Johnston: Themes Within her Novels

The majority of Johnston's early novels such as, *The Gates*, *The Old Jest*, *The Captains and the Kings*, *Fool's Sanctuary* and *How Many Miles to Babylon?* considers the role of the Ascendancy in the twentieth century, which has often led to her being classified as a Big House writer; critics point to her Protestant background as evidence of her nostalgia for the Ascendancy. However like Madden, Johnston is not so much perpetuating this genre, as engaging with its tropes and themes to explore how this historical period may remain as a site of trauma for modern Ireland. Johnston shows sympathy for the women caught in a colonial trap and nostalgia for these once beautiful places, whilst acknowledging their hidden violent pasts. Her early novels echo back to the trauma of the First World War and its influence on the Big Houses, which lost many of their progenitors. Johnston's later novels, such as *The Railway Station Man*, *Grace and Truth*, and *The Gingerbread Woman*, are an interesting exploration of the schisms and transitional positions of Irish society as they simultaneously engage with the past and present. The condensed and often fragmented form of her narratives points toward her opening up of definitions and memory. She prefers to explore her ideas about identity and politics through metaphor and association, as a poet would do, to prise open new ways of seeing. Margaret Scanlon comments that Johnston's novels try to foreground women's lives within the context of the Troubles and that some in particular give a "fuller and more critical portrayal of a woman attempting to live outside gender roles

and inbred prejudice” (Scanlon 164, 5). Scanlon notes for example how in Johnston’s *The Railway Station Man* Helen learns to survive the death of her husband, her son, and her lover by using painting as a dialogue with grief. Johnston’s main thematic concern in her novels is looking backwards into a past that is littered with traumatic memory.

Johnston’s earliest novels begin her exploration of the Big House as a trope for the psychological trauma of the divided sense of nationhood within the Anglo-Irish. She begins her engagement with the lasting trauma of the Ascendancy period by depicting the Gothic entrapment of a young girl in her uncle’s decaying Big House in *The Gates* (1973), which has many overlapping themes with *Invisible Worm*. Most importantly Johnston acknowledges the symbolism of the Big House as a scar on the landscape, which signifies the loss of almost a third of the population through famine and emigration and its own inevitable decline following the Irish wars. Minnie’s recovery of her inheritance is depicted by Johnston through the romanticised stories of the revolutionary escapades as told to her by Jim, a local who was involved with the Irish Rebellion. When Minnie forms a friendship with Kevin MacMahon, he persuades her to sell the gates of the estates to Mr Maguire, whose father had created the gates before emigrating to America. Maguire saw his act as a reclamation of his family history, whereas Minnie’s uncle, the Major, saw it as the ruination of his family home. The gates become a symbol of the historical division between the communities and the fracturing of the Irish psyche from the trauma of being shut out of its own politics and land. By removing the gates there is no longer a barrier between the estate and the surrounding countryside, but this does not remove the historical gulf between the privileged owners and the horrors of the poverty suffered by the villagers. The trauma of this period in history is a theme which Johnston returns to on numerous occasions in her novels, but it is in *Invisible Worm* where she most considers it as a still present, generational trauma.

Johnston’s *The Christmas Tree* (1981) emphasises the growing connection of Ireland’s early relationship with Europe and the complications wrought by the modern commercial and political movements. It connects Irish history to European history through the trauma of war by linking the trauma of the Second World War experiences of a male Polish Jew with the traumas of an Irish Catholic woman. Johnston creates a dialogue between these two traumatised protagonists as a way of exploring the nature of witnessing and the fluidity of identity markers, something which she will return to in

several novels including *Invisible Worm*. Johnston shows how Ireland and Poland share a sense of past traumas by depicting the effects of the war through her Irish and Polish character's traumatic memories. Constance, a modern Irish cosmopolitan feminist chooses Jacob Weinberg, a Polish Jewish writer, to be the father of her baby, but when she discovers she is dying from cancer she invites him to visit and asks him to be an active parent looking after his little girl. Part of the trauma is the need to bear witness, to tell the story, however this is complicated by the way it can induce secondary trauma. Johnston symbolises this with Constance's leukaemia: "All the little white cells are eating all the little red ones. [...] Isn't it odd that I never even suspected that this sort of ... well, genocide was going on inside me?" (Johnston 145) The description she depicts of the illness links Constance to Jacob's family history, thus pointing beyond the individual's experiences of trauma, towards the collective traumas of their generational and national history. Johnston as well as exploring these historical connections, also explores Ireland's current economic and political position within Europe to ask how the past may be influencing new relationships. Ultimately, by overlapping the stories of her two main characters, she derails religious bifurcations, and gender definitions become blurred as 'his'-story is absorbed into the female narration of modern Irish identity.

This is a recurring theme in Johnston's writing and is particularly noticeable in later works such as *The Gingerbread Woman* (2000) where Johnston portrays how Clara deals with the trauma of her hysterectomy, which leaves her childless and confronting issues of creativity within her telling of her story. As with other Johnston novels, there is a layering of the male and female protagonist's narratives to create a fluidity in the boundaries. In this case Lar's story is, like his name, captured within Clara's writing. Towards the end of the novel Clara plays with the concept of writing the Other into Her story:

Another strange thought came into my mind, that maybe one day I may use his story; steal it from him. Yes. Maybe he gave me more than I can at this moment handle, something to ferment and foment in the dark cavities of the brain. Cccllllmmm. (Johnston 205)

Clara's "ccccllllmmm" is her beginning of the Caitlan-Laurence-Moira story, a tale within her quasi-autobiographical framing narrative that melts these identities together. When Clara begins to write her story she indicates that the act of writing, like Laura's uncovering of the summerhouse in *Invisible Worm*, gives her back her sense of herself as a woman. This could be seen as an unusual kind of doubling, whereby the key

characters are connected through their individual experiences of trauma. Ann Owen Weekes points out in *Irish Women Writers* that Johnston's constant interweaving of first and third person narrative allows the narrator to enter into the story and comment upon their own actions, while simultaneously disrupting the concept of linear time (Weekes 195). Indeed Johnston's work is often critiqued, as for example by Rüdger Imhof (1985) and Kathleen Wheeler (1998), for her constant use of dialogue, which gives the story the immediacy of a play, thus allowing a direct access to the character's voices. Johnston has referred to her writing as a visualisation of the characters within their scenes, "I see everything in terms of pictures and scenes" and she considers how using the flashback technique "coincides with my natural inclinations which are really we are the way we are because of what has happened to us" (Johnston in York: Lazenblatt 40). This, along with the interplay of descriptions of the immediate setting, places the onus on the reader to interpret the meaning of the situation without the narrator's mediating voice. This stylistic device is employed in a significantly effective form within *Invisible Worm*, as it explores both the individual and national traumas.

The Invisible Worm

This is a novel about memory and trauma, which takes personal trauma and extrapolates it into an exploration of Irish national trauma. Johnston uses her settings, her characters and her plot to consider the clash of tradition with modernity, male with female, and Protestant with Catholic, but in doing so she shows that often there is a blurring of the boundaries. The novel makes constant references, particularly toward the colonial past of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy through objects of remembrance, such as those found in the house, and through sites of memory as exemplified in the summerhouse as the site of Laura's trauma. In this novel Laura's recounting of her trauma is enabled by the simultaneous uncovering of her male counterpart Dominic's story. Laura was raped by her father in their summerhouse, which has subsequently become hidden beneath the undergrowth of weeds and brambles. Her mother commits suicide when she learns of the rape and Laura's father blames her for the death. Laura's telling of the story incorporates the traumas of Dominic, a "spoilt" priest disowned by his family. The summerhouse becomes a microcosm for exploring the role of the Ascendancy in Ireland. Laura takes time to uncover the buried summerhouse, which is the site of her trauma, before she burns the whole building to the ground in a necessary cleansing from the defilement of the past. The burning of the summerhouse connects to the historical

burning of the Big Houses throughout Ireland around the end of the nineteenth century and therefore associates the Ascendancy with incest. Johnston re-writes the metaphor of the rape of the nation to counteract Heaney's "Act of Union" by complicating his simplistic binarisms of passive female Ireland and aggressive British male. She does not use the rape metaphor to represent the British coloniser taking the land and power from the Irish, but instead considers the complication of an incestuous relationship with an abuse of power from a damaged patriarchy. Johnston's use of the trope engages only with Irish politics and incorporates all aspects of the Irish identity, but associates the female with the Protestantism Ascendancy and the male as both Catholic aggressor and victim. Laura and her mother are the last in the line as inheritors of the Big House. Laura's father and her husband Maurice depict the crossing of the power from the traditional to the modern political powers, and Dominic embodies the loss of religious power. The colonial past therefore sits alongside modern Ireland, with its diverse religious and political confrontations of heritage and tradition. Weekes in "Ordinary Women" (1995) summarises the portrayal of current politics as representing postcolonial republicanism: "The invisible worm represents the incestuous sickness in the Irish domestic and national scene where the Anglo-Irish mother abandons her daughter and the Gaelic-Irish father endows her with the madness and guilt of the encounter" (Weekes 95). The destruction of the Big House is both the loss of a rich history and the removal of a rotting site of trauma. Johnston therefore explores contemporary Ireland beyond the colonial in a way that suggests it remains as a collective national trauma in all communities and political affiliations. As Laura uncovers her past, her story blurs into that of her other; the return of the repressed brings a liminal space for examining personal and national identity binarisms.

Laura has inherited two very different sets of memories from her parents. From her mother she has taken responsibility for an old house filled with memorabilia. Laura feels an uncanny connection to her mother's house, which she notes is "her house" and not her husband's or her father's:

It's strange really; for three generations it has descended through the female line.
I inherited it from my mother and she inherited it from hers.
I did try to have a daughter.
I believe in continuity, the handing down of secrets; I want someone else to hear
the whispers, the breaths from the past, as I have always done; someone else to
be stirred by the tremors of memory. (Johnston 4)

Along with the house, Laura's heritage includes traumatic memories. Laura's infertile condition represents the dying out of the Ascendancy, whose power is long gone, and her childlessness acknowledges that there will be nothing left of the colonial representatives in the Irish future. The opening scene at her father's funeral is dominated by the powerful male politicians and Church leaders. Laura's mother has said of her husband: "He was of course the new nobility" (Johnston 110). This refers to the role of the politicians in the Irish republic who had both the power and the stature that had previously been given to the British colonials. In this way Johnston shows the shifting power base in Irish politics and the destruction it creates for future generations. Laura considers how she has inherited pain from her father: "the cold is spreading out from me; maybe it will embrace the whole church, the whole town, the whole island: I will infect this race with my hatred" (Johnston 8). The secrets she has inherited from her mother, and the trauma inflicted by her father, need to be born witness to. The father's death initiates the return of the repressed memories seeping into her everyday life events; of dogs barking and his hands shaking her violently and "my own voice screaming, tears suddenly at the soft corners of my brain" (Johnston 5). Through the months that follow Laura uncovers her memory of her trauma by acting out the physical recovery of the summerhouse, which is witnessed by Dominic.

Laura describes Dominic as an "unfinished man" the colour of "unfinished clay: hair, skin, lips, lashes, eyes, all the one dun colour like the fields before the greening happened" (Johnston 15). Dominic does not believe that there is a definite past but one that can be coloured by emotions. He says: "We paint our own pictures of the past" (Johnston 113). Dominic rejects definitions and the various binarisms that are scrutinised in the story by recognising that the label placed upon the person is not only incorrect but suggestive of a form of exclusivity that does not exist. When Laura is introduced to Dominic they each begin to tell the other about their lives and in doing so their words are interwoven so that they appear to be telling the same story:

'They called me Dominic. That...'
'...could shatter a vase with the power of his voice...'
'was the gift they gave me at birth, [...] I was given that name...'
'...and he spent years trying to imitate him...' (Johnston 25)

This passage gives the impression that we are able to understand the narrative both from an objective and subjective position. In the above quotation Dominic is telling us his understanding of who he is, and why he perceives that he was moulded into this

identity, and at the same time Laura's speech appears as a 'voice-over' commenting on the story and helping to highlight the powerful patriarchal voice that dominated both their lives. This is an effective shaping tool within a story that at times has gaps in Laura's ability to tell her story and thus helps enhance her own objectification of her past self. Laura's memory of her trauma is trapped in her birds-eye objectification of her younger self running in the opening lines of the novel:

I stand by the window and watch the woman running.
Is it Laura?
I wonder that, as I watch her flickering like blown leaves through the trees.
I am Laura.
Sometimes I run so fast that my legs buckle under me; ungainly, painful.
This woman runs with dignity.
[...]
Sometime, someone must have said to her...Black suits you, Laura.
No, I am Laura. (Johnston 1-2)

Laura from the present time is unable to recognise her past self in her memory and refuses to accept the image as part of her. This is not unusual in PTSD where the pre-traumatised self is frequently described as cut off from the present-day self, and the moment of trauma described as a death or burial of the younger self. Laura, wearing black is in mourning for the death of her childhood, a mourning that is rekindled at her father's funeral. It is only by the death of the father that Laura is able to find release to explore her trauma; while he remains alive, he and her husband work together to keep her voicelessly trapped in her mother's house. On his death, she begins to gain a voice through the empowerment of combining her story with that of Dominic's; the acknowledgement he gives through their overlapping stories allows her to tell her story. Kali Tal describes this as retaining or gaining "control over the interpretation of their trauma", thereby "codifying it in its own terms" (Tal 7). This is a very important part of the process of witnessing as it gives the power and the voice back to the traumatised. Tal also suggests that testimony purges the survivor of the evil and bears witness to the social or political injustices, because within the word 'testimony' is both the private story and the public declaration (Tal 200). Laura was unable to publicly speak out against her powerful politically allied father and he silenced her within their home by laying the guilt of the mother's death upon her. With his death she is finally able to finish the purging of her story by combining it with Dominic's story.

The process of working through trauma necessitates for Laura a reliving or repeating of the experience by entering into the summerhouse and returning to the site of her trauma. It also necessitates having Dominic as a witness to this returning to the past, and he is able, through his own traumas, to empathetically listen to hers. As she tells him her story, she moves it into the present tense and relives the physical sensations as if it is re-happening. Dominic understands her narrative and passively listened but: “He felt burdened by what she had told him” (Johnston 160). Laura has in a sense projected her trauma outward upon Dominic who has taken on the role of her objectified double. His acceptance of her story allows Laura to be free from the repeated dreams and flashbacks:

I smile at the thought of that man, that Dominic. *Perhaps* my dreams will in the future be of him. I will see his smile. I hope he won't carry my burden, as well as the present [of the model train] I gave him, for too long. (italics original. Johnston 181)

Johnston's use of the word “perhaps” suggest Laura has found a connection with her pre-traumatized self through Dominic's witnessing of her narrative. Linda Belau notes in *Topologies of Trauma* (2002) that part of the working through of trauma is how knowledge “resists the integration of a trauma by maintaining it as that which it is impossible to make into a ‘reality’” thus the return of the repressed is a way of suggesting it can be understood; “an effect pertaining to the impossibility of integrating the event into a knowledgeable network” (Belau xvii, xvi). By physically returning to the site of the trauma, Laura is able to work through her repressed memories and prevent the repeating of flashbacks of the trauma. Bearing witness to the narrative acknowledges the horror and destructive power of the events, and the burning of the site purges Laura from its continued effects.

Traumatic memory is central to *The Invisible Worm*; it moves erratically between the present day and the traumatic past often without demarcations between the two so that Laura's past is re-lived as part of her present, and the narrative incorporates the two timeframes in one. She states: “I am not sure in which tense I live, the present or the past. Both seem irreconcilably intermingled in my mind. The future doesn't bother me. The future has no reality for me” (Johnston 82). When she is uncovering the site of her trauma Laura is reliving the past in the present. She thinks how difficult it can be to remember the past as it actually was: “memory is like a kaleidoscope, repatterning, re-tricking the past in your head” (Johnston 31). The memories of her childhood, through

triggers such as the barking of a dog, flashback in such a way that they are fragmented and isolated from one another. Much of Johnston's descriptions of Laura's trauma uses a Freudian framework of dissociation, catatonic states, and dream sequences to convey the repressed and unknown narrative of her buried trauma. Laura describes the decision to uncover the summerhouse as if it was separate from herself, as something that "arrived in her mind", like a letter delivered to her consciousness:

In the sheltered corner, way down below the house, someone about a hundred years before had built a summerhouse. [...] Since the drowning of her mother, Laura had not been near it. She had watched from a distance as brambles and ferns grew and shrubs became choked and the unpruned branches of the trees thickened out and finally the little house also was drowned." (Johnston 41)

The summerhouse has become like Sleeping Beauty's palace, hidden beneath the weeds and brambles, thus signifying the site of her buried traumas beneath her present unhappiness. In a reversal of roles, she becomes the Prince Charming hacking her way into the hidden palace of the Sleeping Beauty, uncovering from the past a mixture of parts that need burning and the "good stuff in under all that mess" so that she must tread carefully (Johnston 44). She describes the act of uncovering it as one of "penance" and "disinterring the past ... a little bit of the past" (Johnston 42). This signifies her feelings of guilt towards her mother's death and suggests her past self is buried and therefore cut off from her present identity. This uncovering is a lengthy process frequently disrupted by Dominic and Maurice, by Laura's own fragmented memories, by snatches of song and by her disjointed engagement with the world around her.

Johnston captures the fragmented nature of trauma during the section of the novel where Laura begins to engage with her past. This is done by delaying the central moment of entering the site of trauma so that Laura can return, through a variety of short flashbacks, to the events surrounding her rape and her mother's suicide. Johnston emphasises the debilitating impact of these latent memories on Laura's life, alongside the physical toil of bringing the repressed memories to the surface. The body plays an important role in the recovery process, with smells and objects bringing flashes of bodily sensations to the surface. The final stage of recovery is punctuated by Laura's breakdown, which occurs when opening the summerhouse door releases her memories:

I can feel the walls gathering round me. Impenetrable. I have been, well, grasping life for weeks, perhaps even months. I don't remember.
[...]

Tomorrow I know I will want to die. It's as if there were a stopper somewhere in my body, and when it is pulled out I become slowly drained of hope, love, confidence, even the ability to feel pain; I become an empty skin; I do not even have the energy to kill myself. I long for the safe, lapping waters of the womb, darkness. Tomorrow. It will be like that tomorrow. (Johnston 31, 125)

The resurfacing of her trauma is more than she can mentally or physically cope with so her mind shuts down and she “goes away”, not just for a brief few moments as she is often to be seen doing through the course of her musings, but for weeks. Once again it is the body that is highlighted not just in the descriptive terms used, but in how it shuts down, reducing her to a catatonic state, and when she begins to recover she engages with her trauma through physical sensations. The attempt to narrate her memories are felt in her body: “Echoes hurt my eyes” (Johnston 126). Her body begins to re-live the physical sensations and Laura starts to build up fragmented words. Although she does not have a narrative for the trauma, she describes it as colours that encapsulate her painful emotions. She is unaware that she is in the present day, but exists in the past-present with the trauma awakening in her physical body as if it is currently happening:

My head is so full of pain. I would like to scream, but he puts his hand over my mouth. I try to bite his hand, but he presses hard down on my body and the pain cracks in me and the dog barks in the distance or whines outside my door scratching with his claws on the white paint: the lonely dog wanting in, the lonely man, the pain, and my teeth scrabbling to bite his hand. (Johnston 127-8)

The pain she feels is described as being in the present tense. Her sensations are muddled together and her memories mix together her current leakage of the trauma into the present with a previous return where she mistook the dog scratching at her door for her father from a later memory, when his arrival repeated the trauma like a living, present memory. This fused mental state is described as her current reality, while the present day appears like a ghostly image or haunting dream. When Laura begins to recover, Johnston leaves a gap in the narrative surrounding the trauma and recovery time, and returns to Laura's memories several years later when she returns from France.

Johnston shows how post-trauma, words take on new meanings and uses poetic imagery and colours to symbolise Laura's trauma. Throughout the flashbacks and present day memories the sun signifies the knowledge of the trauma, which is beginning to come to the surface of Laura's consciousness. The sun shining through the coloured glass of the summerhouse, mixes with the coloured pattern of the mother's Turkish rug and the splintering colours fragment over her body. The fragmented pattern of the colours

signifies the fragmented nature of the knowledge of trauma, and its connection to the stained glass and rug suggests the source of the trauma is linked to the wider issues of religion and colonial politics. Like Anderson, Johnston engages with the image of the eye as a way of connecting trauma with witnessing. The sun personifies the glass into a predatory eye and the summerhouse becomes animalistic, described as crouching in wait, ready to attack her through the awakening memories. The moment of the rape remains untold, existing in her body as a bloody, “black painful hole”, which signifies the death of her pre-trauma self and the space that exists in her narrative of suppressed memories (Johnston 156). The lack of sun and colour at this point signifies the gap in Laura’s knowledge of the rape. Johnston shows how Laura’s identity and the way she sees the world have been transformed from fragmented colours to black, the non-colour of death she associates with her mother and the trauma of her rape, which is symbolised in the returning figure of the woman in black running through her day-time dreams. She acknowledges: “I am tired now of meeting the dead wherever I turn. I am tired of hearing their voices” (Johnston 158). Laura needs to purge herself from the return of the dead and witnesses to Dominic of the burden of guilt she carries towards her mother. She is unable to tell him of her rape, but narrates the emerging story of the part she played in her mother’s death, not from a subjective identity, but as if from an external double who exists as, “Some person inside me” (Johnston 176). By speaking out she takes control of her body and voice, acknowledging the blame for the mother’s suicide lies with her abusive father.

By making the summerhouse the site of the trauma, Johnston has created a symbolic link with the Big House and therefore is referencing the wider collective trauma of a buried history that remains unrecognised within the national psyche. Johnston appears to be suggesting through the roles her characters represent, that the story of the Anglo-Irish remains as an untold trauma. The politically symbolic nature of this rape turns the story away from the aggressive colonial, raping the powerless Irish nation, and producing Northern Ireland as a consequence. Instead Johnston suggests the now strong Irish nation as symbolised by the father legally taking possession of the mother’s inheritance through a mutual agreement, which produces a child and thus symbolises Northern Ireland’s creation through less violent imagery than has been used in previous versions of this symbolism. The trauma for Johnston is therefore not the production of Northern Ireland, but what happens afterwards. Northern Ireland may have been created

as a political compromise, but its existence was to lead to trauma and death. Therefore the rape in Johnston's story signifies the trauma of the Troubles.

Johnston, like Anderson, highlights the importance of voice in the patriarchy of Irish colonialism. The father dominates Laura by demanding she speaks recognition of his position as the father and later he uses her own hair to choke off any words she may try to use to protect herself. This signifies not just the dominance of his political position over her, but shows the voicelessness of the trauma, which remains unspoken. Johnston does not show Laura blaming her mother for her abandonment, but instead suggests she is also a victim to the dangers within a society where women have no voice and no power. Laura's memory of her father is of him in his study surrounded by "voices, male voices, always, male voices" (Johnston 31). The patriarch has power to use his possessions as he sees fit, leaving women under such conditions without voice or agency. Laura finds herself vulnerable to a father who treats her like his possession: "We use those artefacts every day, we live fairly comfortably with the ghosts of the past. It's quite seductive, that. You can't buy that. He became a part of it through me, not through my mother. I was part of that chain and I was also his" (Johnston 121). Johnston is not only highlighting the historical political position of women within the dominance of patriarchy, but is also pointing towards the power imbalance between the Irish and the Ascendancy. Johnston suggests that Laura's mother, who represents the Anglo-Irish, "escaped" to other shores when the power shifted in favour of her father and husband, who represent the new Free State: "I think she hated having to turn over her independence to someone else. She escaped inside her head, and of course in her boat" (Johnston 81). Laura imagines how her mother in death could be romanticised as the beautiful, passive female, floating like Ophelia. Her mother however told Laura that she saw herself as a pirate, like Grace O'Malley (Granuaile), who cut off all her hair and refused to behave in the traditional female role but instead fought in many wars including the Spanish Armada and against the English attempts to take over Ireland. Granuaile's heroics contrasts to Laura's father's passive part in the Irish fight for freedom. Laura sees her mother's death by drowning in similar terms to the purging of the past through the burning of the summerhouse. Laura's decision to burn down the summerhouse is an echo of the burning of the Big Houses during the Rebellion. The burning suggests a cleansing from the past, similar to the mother's submersion in water, and both become emblems of re-birth for the image of the Irish women.

Laura's trauma is not just a single incident in her life but is the result of generational power abuse and repression. Laura's first encounter with the uncovered summerhouse reveals a rotten structure with a "weeping willow with a crooked trunk" leaning away and trying to come into flower (Johnston 90). The willow is associated with Ireland, which Johnston emphasises by calling it by its Irish name *Saileach* and by referencing the W.B. Yeats poem "Down by the Sally Gardens". Johnston frequently entwines her character's words and thoughts with snatches from songs and poems to show how they connect the past to the present. The summerhouse in this case is symbolic of the Ascendancy and the rot which that period left behind in Irish history. As the memories start to flood back Laura begins to sing "Have a care, Lord Kildare, Fiacch will do, what Fiacch will dare" (Johnston 112). This quotation is from a folksong (famously sung by Planxty) called "Follow me up to Carlow". Kildare was an Irish Catholic Peer who had helped Henry VIII and Edward VI. The song celebrates the defeat of 3,000 English soldiers who were sent to suppress the Irish rebellion. Following this victory Fitzgerald and a third of Munster were killed, either in the fighting or by famine and disease. By quoting this song Johnston is highlighting a rebellion that happened during some of the worst parts of the Irish/British wars, a period that can be seen as the beginning of the religious and political divide at the root of the current problems. Johnston misquotes the lines from the chorus of "Follow me up to Carlow" in such a way as to change the person to whom a warning is being issued. In the original song the chorus states: "Fiach will do what Fiach will dare, now Fitzwilliam, have a care." This posits Fitzwilliam as the person who should have a care. Johnston's version aligns with her key theme of incest; it is not the British leaders but the Irish peers who harm or 'rape' their own. This is in keeping with Johnston's use of the trope throughout the novel. Johnston shows how it is no longer the colonial power abuses that are at fault but the patriarchal society, which allowed for the abuse of women and children without recourse.⁵¹

Laura's trauma is her rape and her mother's death, and her guilt and powerlessness, which are both linked in Johnston's story to the traditional role of the Irish woman. She depicts Laura with the weight of her female ancestry on her shoulders, haunted by the woman in black running away. This figure is both her and her mother; it is the ghost of the trauma:

In black, as usual.

⁵¹ The publication of Johnston's novel coincides with public discussions over rape and child abuse.

Always black.
She could be any age.
My age.
My mother's age.
My daughter's age. [...]
She leaves no mark on the grass as she runs. Her dress flutters and flows,
streaming from her sides like water.
All ages.
All women. (Johnston 65)

Johnston breaks down the disempowerment of women, which opens them up to abuse by the family and the state. The father has stolen, "most of all, peace. I have never been able to find peace inside my head. He never understood. The destroyer never understands" (Johnston 144). Laura suggests that what has happened to her is not something that will ever go away, but remains as a repressed trauma that will continue to resurface throughout her life. Johnston does not negate the patriarchal, nor the colonial past but exposes how it is experienced in Ireland as a series of traumatic occurrences. She suggests that such moments are best discussed openly, but she also suggests that these public representations of the past are not the full story and must to some degree acknowledge that they hold within their umbrella representations of the stories of individual people.

Claire Hughes notes that women played a major role in the declining Anglo-Irish society: "In a context of decaying colonialism, the only hope of survival for their class is the exchange of daughters in marriage: without endogamy the isolated houses simply rot, burn and die" (Hughes 122). Johnston's earlier novels uphold this notion by creating a variety of relationships or doorways into relationships, which would unite the Protestants with the Catholics. However, by *The Invisible Worm* Johnston appears to have rejected the hope that a joint future can be found and instead shows her Protestant females marrying into or passing on their history to the Catholic Other. Laura's father tells his wife that Maurice and his family are the future for Ireland: "They've lost. Your swanky lot. Lost. And about time too" (Johnston 116). With no children, Laura's history will disappear with her death. When Dominic first enters Laura's home he is intrigued by the collection of objects that fill the house. Maurice tells him that none of this is his history; it all belongs to Laura: "Hers. They're all hers. [...] The place is like a bloody museum" (Johnston 12). Johnston depicts the Big House as belonging to the female line and the objects that the two men, as representatives of the contemporary Catholic power bases (Maurice the up and coming politician and Dominic the Church, which is

diminishing in power) focus upon, are symbols of colonialism, medals, miniatures, china figures, jade sculptures: “Her family did that sort of thing, you know...Inja and all that. Empire building...soldiering. You know the sort of thing” (Johnston 12). Laura denies that these objects can so easily be read as imperialist and instead hints that there is always another perspective to the story. The modern Ireland cannot have the same connection to the past as her father was able to gain through Laura’s birth. Among the post-imperialist relics is a miniature railway engine, which her great-grandfather had given to her grandfather, and Laura in a symbolic gesture, gives it to Dominic. As a vehicle it signifies the journey that both have gone through to release them from their pasts. His plans to leave for Europe also signifies the breaking of old and modern Ireland and its new connections with the European Union. The objects or lack of objects on Dominic’s part, signify the two characters different positions toward their past. Laura remains tied to the objects and the house that are the sites of her, and her families, traumatic memories, whereas Dominic is released from the objects that connect him to his past, but he goes out carrying his own and Laura’s traumas within himself. Perhaps the most significant part played in this novel is that of memory, for it places history as alive within the present national traumas.

Deirdre Madden: An Introduction to the Author

Deirdre Madden was born in Belfast in 1960 and spent her childhood living in Toomebridge, County Antrim. She went to St Mary’s Grammar School where she first began taking her creative writing seriously and proceeded to achieve her first publication in David Marcus’ *Irish Writing* (1980). She graduated in 1983 from Trinity College Dublin before travelling to England to achieve an MA from Malcolm Bradbury’s Creative Writing School at the University of East Anglia in 1985. Following her studies Madden travelled to Italy where she spent three years before returning to Ireland. She has also spent an extended period of time in France and particularly Paris. She was Writer-in-Residence at University College Cork in 1994 and Writer Fellow at Trinity College Dublin in 1997 and she is currently teaching an MA in Creative Writing at Trinity College. She is married to the Irish poet Harry Clinton and, alongside Jennifer Johnston, is an elected member of the Aosdána.⁵² Madden’s first novel *Hidden Symptoms* was published in 1986 by Faber in their *First Fictions: Introduction 9* anthology. Madden has since written a further seven novels, all with Faber and Faber:

⁵² See footnote 45 page 152

The Birds of the Innocent Wood (1988), *Remembering Light and Stone* (1992), *Nothing is Black* (1994), *One by One in the Darkness* (1996), *Authenticity* (2002), *Molly Fox's Birthday* (2008), and her most recent novel, *Time Present and Time Past* (2013). Like Beckett, Madden has written books for children, *Snake's Elbows* (2005), *Thanks for Telling Me, Emily* (2007) and *Jasper and the Green Marvel* (2011) all of which are published by London's Orchard Books. Madden has also written a number of non-fiction pieces including an "Introduction" to Kate O'Brien's *The Ante-Room* (London: Virago, 1996) and reviews of Kathleen Ferguson's *The Maid's Tale* and Aisling Foster's *Safe in the Kitchen*.⁵³ Madden has received a number of awards for her writing including the Hennessy Literary Award 1980, the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature 1987, the Somerset Maugham Award for Authors 1989, and Listowel Kerry Ingredients Book of the Year 1996. Two of Madden's novels, *One by One in the Darkness* and *Molly Fox's Birthday* have been shortlisted for the *Orange Prize for Literature*. Madden can therefore be considered to be part of the Irish literati and a prolific writer in multiple genres, who has been accredited for the quality of her novel writing.

Madden's novels have, in the main, been well received with positive reviews that focus on her in depth characters and quality of writing. For example, Maxine Jones "Review of *One by One in the Darkness*" (1996) for *Tribune Magazine*, considers her novel as opening up an empathetic understanding of the Troubles (Jones 20). Patricia Craig's review of *One by One*, however, although praising the quality of the descriptive passages, describes the novel as filled with sad characters and failing to achieve an analysis of the IRA (Craig 26). Eamonn Hughes' review of this novel in "Belfastards and Derriers" describes it as "an Irish Chekhovian" representation of the three sisters (Hughes 154). The novels that Madden has written with overt connections to the Troubles such as *One by One* and her earlier *Hidden Symptoms* have been given the most attention by her critics for their representations of Northern Ireland, but several of her other novels have also been given consideration. *Nothing is Black* was admired by Andrea Ashworth in her *TLS* review for its "starkly poetic prose" but she critiques Madden's over-use of abstract dialogue as a way of exploring philosophical ideas in a less than realistic fashion (Ashworth 24). *Authenticity* is described by Alfred Hickling in his 2002 review of the novel as a "disillusionment with art" and ultimately a "loss of faith in life itself" and he highlights the "strange ordinariness" of her intense

⁵³ Madden, Deirdre. "Summer Books" Review. *Fortnight* (July/Aug. 1994): 18.

descriptions and observations.⁵⁴ Similarly Justine Ettler's review of *Authenticity* admires Madden's balance of depth and reserve in a novel about writing and passion, which she describes as "at once a cautionary tale against bad parenting [and] a pitch-perfect depiction of the reality of the artistic life".⁵⁵ Eve Patten highlights Madden's "psychological precision and sustained faithful characterisation" in her review of *Remembering Light and Stone* (Craig 51). *Molly Fox's Birthday*, which was her second novel to be nominated for the Orange Prize, has also received multiple reviews, as for example Jeannie Vanacso's "Method Writing" for *The New York Times* which praises Madden's intense emotional prose and suggests her novel is a study of great writing.⁵⁶

The critical reception for Madden's novels has focused on a small selection; mainly, like the reviews, on *Hidden Symptoms* and *One by One in the Darkness*. For example, Gerry Smyth has written on *Hidden Symptoms* in *The Novel and the Nation: Studies in New Irish Fiction* (1997), as has Tamara Benito de la Inglesia in her essay "Born into the Troubles: Deirdre Madden's *Hidden Symptoms*" for the *International Journal of English Studies* (2002). *One by One* is mentioned by Laura Pelaschiar in *Writing the North* (1998) and Geraldine Higgins essay "A Place to Bring Anger and Grief: Deirdre Madden's Northern Irish Novels" in Lazenblatt's *Writing Ulster*. Liam Harte and Michael Parker in *Contemporary Irish Fiction* consider the novel's foregrounding of Bloody Friday as the focal representation of the Troubles instead of the more typical Bloody Sunday because it was an occasion that divided nationalist opinions and therefore echoed the divided response of the two brothers, Charlie who supports Sinn Féin's position and Brian who justified the SDLP viewpoint (Harte and Parker 251). Jerry White in his 1999 essay "Europe, Ireland and Deirdre Madden" has similarly written on *Hidden Symptoms* and *One by One* but has also focused on *The Birds of the Innocent Wood*, a novel that has seen very little critical attention. White describes these novels as articulating "cultural mourning, apprehension about the past, and anxiety about closed, stagnant societies", which is an apt portrayal of the mood that Madden succinctly captures through her characters and settings (White 451). White suggests that Madden's writing has a cosmopolitan style, even as it focuses on the ways in which Irish identity is being diluted and transformed. He considers that the concept of home appears ambiguous in these novels as it sits between "renewal and alienation" and he

⁵⁴ <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/aug/24/featuresreviews.guardianreview12>>

⁵⁵ <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/oct/06/fiction.features>>

⁵⁶ Vanacso, Jeannie. "Method Writing." Sunday Book Review. *The New York Times*. 27 March 2010. rpt. <<http://www.nytimes.com/indexes/2010/03/27/books/review/index.html>>

suggests this may be connected to Madden's own fragmented pathways back-and-forth from Ireland (White 451). White finds Madden's writing full of nuances and meanings that would lean towards new readings using postcolonial and postnational theories, thus opening up the ways in which her novels consider contemporary Ireland:

Madden's work as a whole engages with a wide variety of concerns both social and interpersonal, and therefore demands a diverse, and qualified, theoretical perspective. Her novels are important in recent Irish literature in no small part because they highlight female subjectivity, evoking the life of the modern nation through the experiences which the Irish powers-that-be had, until quite recently, steadfastly ignored. In this way she is part of a rebirth in women's writing on the island. (White 451)

White is suggesting that Madden's writing has both a breadth and a depth that sets it apart from her contemporaries and he praises her skilful use of literary techniques. Madden is therefore an important writer who has received both critical and literary acclaim and is, as White suggests, an important representation of a woman writer who is producing complex work worthy of further investigation.

Madden has given interviews and book readings which has helped to promote her understanding of her work, for example "Dark Thoughts from Abroad" an interview published in *Books Ireland* (1996). In Philip Cummins "Interview: 'I Find Everything Interesting' Says Deirdre Madden" in *The Irish Post* (2013) Madden describes her keen eye for detail in life and art and how it is not always easy to translate thoughts into concrete words during the writing process. She describes her interest in how the past influences the present by delineating how she has used concepts such as the photography process as a way of expressing memory and the ways that photographs influence our memories of the past:

I became interested in how colour photography and colour photographs had been taken at times in history that I hadn't been aware of. An example is of a photo from World War One. If you see those photos in black and white, they look very dramatic, very austere, but if you see them in colour – and these are actual photographs in colour that haven't been improved or impressed with a colour filter – they're so immediate, more contemporary, much more closer to us.[...] I think that we sometimes find the past can seem further away from where it is. The whole way of how we view the past, how we picture the past is interesting to me. And I thought that photographs worked as a good medium to discuss that particular view.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ <<http://www.irishpost.co.uk/entertainment/interview-i-find-everything-interesting-says-deirdre-madden>>

Madden's concepts in her latest novel *Time Present and Time Past* are therefore a development of her focus on ways of expressing memory that she has traced throughout her novels and in particular in her use of nature imagery such as birds and shells in *The Birds of the Innocent Wood*. Madden's concept of time and memory throughout her novels would make an interesting study of thematics within her novels. In a similar way comparisons could also be drawn between Madden's representation of 'home' and her husband Harry Clifton's descriptions of home in his poetry. For example, Benjamin Keatinge's essay "'The Clouds of Ireland Gathered Over France': Harry Clifton's *Secular Eden*" (2012) notes the migratory nature of Clifton's family life and how this has changed the way he represents his understanding of home. Keatinge argues that Clifton describes home with a global quality, describing it within multiple destinations such as Paris, Dublin and so forth (Keatinge 224). This is not dissimilar to the way Madden responds to Cummins' question concerning how she responds to Dublin and if she sees it as home. "Everything feels new to me, whether I'm in Dublin, in the North, wherever I am."⁵⁸ There are many interesting representations of Ireland past and present in Madden's writing and many areas of interest that have remained unexplored to date. By moving beyond her most frequently discussed works to explore neglected aspects of her novels, a fresh perspective can be gained into the wealth of material captured within her writing.

Deirdre Madden: Themes Within her Novels

Madden's writing, like Johnston's, considers the past as a way of exploring current traumas, albeit in a different fashion. Her literary devices and tropes tend to focus on the philosophical rather than the socio-political arena. She explores identity by placing her characters in a variety of locations so that even the novels which explicitly engage with Northern Ireland may take the characters to other countries. This does not lessen her unpicking of the female Northern Irish subjectivity, but expands the definition and shows, like Johnston and Anderson, the complexity and diversity within national identity in a multi-cultural society where travel and migration are increasing. Her earlier writing focuses on Ireland, its history, politics and the Troubles, but with a diversity of style and content that distinguishes it from other works of this time. For example, in her first novel *Hidden Symptoms* (1986) Madden moves from a claustrophobic examination

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

of the Troubles to an existential exploration of faith and death, which she emphasises through her use of setting, with the warmth of the stones and land in Italy sharply contrasting to the bleak darkness of Belfast. *The Birds of the Innocent Wood* which is Madden's second novel, turns away from the direct depiction of troubled Belfast in *Hidden Symptoms* to include other traumas within Ireland's history. Her characters are shown dealing with influences from the past, often the death or absence of parents, and how generational allegiances can remain influences. Michael Parker describes her writing as "haunted by a profound sense of the impermanence and fragility of things", which suggests a brokenness in her character's engagement with grief (Parker, 2007b 66). Madden's novels have a tendency to create a dichotomy for the chief protagonists and often explore the tension created in characters caught between opposing emotions. *Hidden Symptoms*, *Birds* and *One by One in the Darkness* are intensely focused on exploring traumatic Irish history. All three of these novels, which were written across the 1980s and 1990s, examine how social trauma connects to individual trauma by means of similar condensing techniques such as doubling.

In *One By One in the Darkness* (1996) Madden returns to the concept of home and the uncanny by revisiting many of the symbols from *Birds*, such as the doubling of characters and the use of the uncanny, however Madden eschews gothic tropes to explore the trauma in a more overt fashion. This novel depicts the effects of a sectarian murder through the divergent memories and experiences of three daughters, one who leaves for London, one who moves to Belfast and one who remains at home, which is the site of their trauma. Rather than searching for the origins of the trauma, the novel acknowledges the devastating impact of current traumas upon individuals and groups. The eldest daughter, who works in England, considers home as "a solid stone house where the silence was uncanny" (Madden 1). "Going home" here is indicative of going back to the site of Cate's childhood, but also the site of her trauma. Home is no longer the Freudian *das Heimliche* of her early childhood, because it was in her uncle and aunt's kitchen where her father was murdered:

The loss of her father has exposed a radical discrepancy between self, place, sign and reality, past and present. Her former agency and determination have been replaced by an awareness of disconnection and fragmentation. Truth has become provisional; meaning, contingent; home, a fearful, unfamiliar place. (Harte and Parker 239)

The kitchens in both houses are receptacles for memory: one is filled with books and photographs and the other is a cold and clinical modern refurbishment, which now stands as a memorial to the moment when family life was destroyed. The two kitchens symbolise the three sisters emotional attachment to their past; in one are all the memories of their childhood and in the other is their missing past, for this kitchen holds nothing connected to their past or that moment of trauma. Cate's childhood in Ireland where she has been defined both by her family relationships and memories, is overshadowed by the trauma of her father's murder.⁵⁹ Madden revisits her use of mirroring as separation of self and trauma by showing Cate's reaction to her scar: "Touching the scar [at her hairline] quickly, so that no one ever realised that she was doing it, restored a sense of reality, a sense of who she was, in a way that looking at her own reflection could not do (Madden 2). Cate identifies the scar in the mirror as both separate and part of herself and this identification links to her earlier childhood self rather than the adult she now sees in the mirror. The nostalgia of her idyllic rural childhood "home" is removed from her by the trauma, a fact echoed in her sisters, who choose different paths in life as symbols of the very different ways they face the past. The ways in which the sisters represent a different response to the trauma is summed up in the ending where each sister is depicted as joined within the house, while remaining separated from each other: "In the solid stone house, the silence was uncanny. One by one in the darkness, the sisters slept" (Madden 181). The image is uncanny as if the sisters are already lying together in death, joined as they are by their common grief, yet separated by their trauma.

Several of Madden's novels explore fractured identity through trauma by using doubling of characters and plot, but her first novel *Hidden Symptoms* has many similar themes and motifs to *Birds*. *Hidden Symptoms* is set in Belfast which the protagonist Theresa describes as an incestuous place where the gene pool is too narrow, a description that could be applied and thus lead to, a metaphorical reading of *Birds* as an expression of the Troubles. Theresa describes herself as "melting" into sensory perceptions of her experiences. Her sense of being is caught in a place beyond signification; she cannot find a way of describing the experiences she has of her fractured post-traumatised self: "I write about subjectivity - and inarticulation - about life pushing you into a state where everything is melting until you're left with the

⁵⁹ Madden's novels explore the tension created in characters who find themselves caught between opposing emotions, the most dominant being homesickness alongside a desire to escape, the central theme of *Remembering Light and Stone*.

absolute and you can find neither the words nor the images to express it” (Madden 28). This echoes Caruth’s descriptions in *Unclaimed Experience* of trauma as gaps in frameable knowledge; the trauma remains unprocessed by words or images and returns in sensory flashbacks (Caruth 4). *Hidden Symptoms* opens with a doubling of the two protagonists Theresa and her twin brother, in the Bavarian barometer: “when Hans was out Heidi was in and vice versa: never together, always alone, so near, so far, so lonely” (Madden 9). Doubling is also present in the relationship between Kathy and Theresa and in how she uses reflections, shadows, mirrors, and photographs in a similar way to *Birds*. In a scene comparable to the mirror scenes in *Birds* Madden describes Robert’s responses to the suffering of the Northern Irish as a splitting off of the dark, grieving self from the self in the lighted room.

Robert sat by his desk and stared obliquely at the window, behind which a perfect image of his room was suspended in the dark air. He arose and walked to another chair so that he, too, was now reflected and was thus now substantially within and insubstantially without. Glumly, he stared at his dark doppelgänger, which stared back as it floated above the street in its intangible apartment. [...] He wished that he could stop being himself and become that double so that he could be dissolved into nothingness when the morning came. (Madden 88)

Robert is struggling to cope with the trauma of his mother’s death, which collapses into the traumas he witnesses on the streets of Belfast. Madden uses Freud’s doppelgänger to suggest a splitting of the conscious as a positive way of releasing the self from pain and grief without becoming a “nothing”. In Freudian terms Robert’s double is an external objectification of his death drive. Robert and Theresa may both have experienced terrible loss, but their reactions to it are very different. Unlike Robert, Theresa does not embrace her double, nor does she wish to stay in the reflected other space, but instead wishes to escape from the shadow world: “Theresa turned her back upon the mirror, with its cold, circular, distorted room, and looked around the real parlour in which she was standing” (Madden 141-2). Freud notes how when the double is a reflection in mirrors it can be a way of protecting the ego against destruction. He explains how the creation of “der Doppelgänger” can allow the individual the opportunity for “self-criticism”: it is possible to situate the self outside and thus become, in theory, an objective observer (Freud *Uncanny* 387) Theresa has a previous mirror moment in the novel where she stood beside her mother: “their own reflections, ghostly and bloodless as photographic negatives, cast upon the glass behind which lay the solid coffin” (Madden 124). Theresa’s mirror double allows her to objectify her grief and the trauma,

thus separating it from her everyday world, but in doing so she is repressing the event, which disrupts her sense of self and the world around her.

The Birds of the Innocent Woods

Madden's *Birds* is a peculiar mix of Gothic literary devices, which are used to highlight generational trauma. The novel creates an uncanny atmosphere of family secrets, lost histories, lost memories and made-up pasts, and in the background to all of this are the real and somewhat mythical crying of the birds. There are overlaps with Johnston's explorations of narrative memory and gothic tropes such as incest and the Big House, but Madden moves away from an overt interaction with current politics to look at the roots behind their inception. This novel considers how the Ascendancy has been romanticised in Irish literature and explores loss of identity by tracing back through the spiralling and mingling of the character's pasts, to the death and burning of the Big House. Madden shows loss of history in both her protagonists' pasts through the burning down of their homes, with a doubling in their physical appearance and their orphaned early lives. Jane, orphaned age two when her parents' house burns down while she is in hospital, is brought up by her unloving aunt and spends time at a Catholic boarding school, before marrying James and rearing their twin girls in his parents' farmhouse. Ellen, Jane's doppelganger, was born into the Big House beside the farm where she lives after the death of her parents.⁶⁰ She marries Gerald but her son Peter is from an affair with James. Ellen is the illegitimate offspring of the Ascendancy and an Irish Catholic smallholder, James' father. Ellen thus represents the Anglo-Irish, burnt out of their Ascendancy estates and Jane, the Irish Catholic finds herself sharing the same farmlands with her husband James' ex-lover. This in itself would be grounds for a narrative splitting, but Ellen's story is further complicated by her own affair with James (whom she later discovers is her half-brother) and their son's affair with his half-sister Sarah, thus introducing intergenerational incest. The majority of the novel juxtaposes the story of Jane's life with that of her twin daughters, Catherine and Sarah. Each chapter utilises a different point of view, thus interjecting Jane's story with either Catherine or Sarah's story. In this way the novel becomes an amalgamation of the narratives of four women who show a remarkable physical and historical resemblance to

⁶⁰ Madden may be referencing a particular Big House, close to Toomebridge in County Antrim, where she grew up. Shane's Castle (previously known as Edenduffcarrick), which was built on the shores of Lough Neagh by Lord O'Neill's family in 1345, was burnt to the ground in 1816.

one another. Catherine and Sarah are identical twins, yet also opposites in personality. Ellen recognises the “remarkable likeness” between the daughters and their mother, which also suggests a likeness to her (Madden 25). Madden therefore creates a narrative of the lives of four women, who appear as fragmented forms, mirroring and doubling one another as they explore a family and community haunted by generational trauma.

Morality and religion are central themes, particularly when taken in conjunction with death and sexuality. Religion in the novel is a composite of Catholicism with the supernatural and ancient mythology. This is best captured in Madden’s reference to Francis of Assisi, a saint who is associated with nature and birds. “The Canticle of the Sun” is an Italian love poem about the sun, moon, earth, fire, and other images that are commonly found in Celtic mythology. It ends with an acknowledgement of the power of Sister Death, whom no one can escape and the need therefore to die without mortal sin.⁶¹ Religion also connects national identity to the individual identities of the characters, showing how their beliefs divide their sense of self. Both Jane and Catherine have strong religious beliefs, while their doubles, Ellen and Sarah do not. Madden shows how Jane and Catherine both have negative views of their own bodies, rejecting their sexuality as a mortification of the flesh, which is linked to their Catholicism. Catherine’s desire to take Holy vows and become a nun connects her to Jane’s convent school spiritual conversion:

As the child stepped into the corridor she gasped: she felt that she was in a tunnel filled with dazzling light, which destroyed time and space. There was height, coolness, paleness and the smell of flowers. When she came to the end of the corridor she wanted to say to the nun, ‘That was like being nowhere.’
(Madden 3)

The images produced in this description suggest the passing away from one life into another where she will repeat her experiences of loss. Jane’s faith is complicated by her relationship to Sister Imelda. The descriptions of her encounter with this nun echoes Edna O’Brien’s short story “Sister Imelda” where a student falls in love with a young nun at her convent school. O’Brien’s Sister Imelda represents both sides of the girl’s future as she is associated in her mind with her mother and with the Virgin Mary. By referencing this short story Madden is highlighting the intensity of the relationship that

⁶¹ The painting of St Francis refers to a story from the *Fioretti* a collection of folk legends about his life. In this particular story, St Francis comes to a place where many birds fill the trees on both sides of the path and he tells them to thank God for the freedom of flight. Many of his teachings suggest that the world is innately good but is suffering for the primordial sin of humankind. There are several points from these stories that are relevant to Madden’s novel.

is formed between the orphaned Jane and the novice nun, and is potentially pointing towards the choices made by Jane's two daughters, one to marry and the other to become a nun.⁶² Madden is also examining the mortification of sexual desire and the negative representation of the female form through Catholicism (Madonna as submissive virgin or devoted mother). By doing so she comments on the role of religion and creates a basis for the rest of her story. Religion is one of the many forces that work against the characters in ways that cannot be easily explained.

Jerry White (1999) suggests that in *Birds* Madden has created an abstract perception of Ireland that allows for an exploration of nationhood and transnational idealism through her preoccupation with female subjectivity and timelessness within a postcolonial Ireland. Parker points to the complexity of her writing, which he notes has depth of philosophical and psychological enquiry:

A characteristic feature of Madden's early texts is their 'veilings', which, in the words of one critic, leave the reader, 'in a kind of disquieting miasma of non-knowledge that demanded-to-be-known'. The arcane events and indeterminate relationships of her later novel *The Birds of the Innocent Wood*, begin to form a pattern and 'make sense' once one concedes the possibility that incest may have occurred in each of its three generations. (Parker, 2007b, 73)

Parker is acknowledging the density of imagery and metaphor that holds the key themes and characters of this novel together, whilst complicating the multiple readings that are available through its stylistics. There are no supernatural occurrences, yet her style of writing lends itself to the realm of the uncanny. Freud's analysis of the uncanny notes how aesthetics that produce feelings of dread and creeping horror are particularly of interest for examining the human psyche. *Birds* intensifies imagery in a way that makes the world it portrays appear strange, uncanny and supernatural. The natural world is changed through symbolism and gothic references so that it appears unreal. Madden creates for example, a cluster of metaphors around images of birds by linking them to Irish mythology and drawing out further meanings to explore issues of morality and death. Madden's clustering of images works less to create meaning than to create atmosphere, a powerful sense of suggestion, and emotive responses. The atmosphere of secrets, lack of knowledge, lies, and half-known truths leaves the reader not knowing the story, but aware of the emotional turmoil of the characters. The interior becomes

⁶² The young protagonist in O'Brien's story is, like Jane, missing her parents. (1985) It makes the clear definition between the choices ahead for the young girl in her story; she can be a nun or a 'free' modern girl. These idealised forms become confusing as the girl begins to develop sexual desires.

objectified and externalised, which creates a distance between the reader and the characters. The descriptions of the isolated and timeless farmhouse, the white attic in her aunt's house, the wild birds crying over the Lough, and the convent as seen through the eyes of the lonely child, all carry the air of something disturbingly familiar yet unknown.

Madden's expressions of memory acknowledge that trauma can be transgenerational and gendered through language, thus influencing what is remembered and how it is remembered. The family is the specific and immediate site of memory reproduction as it is the place where, through learned and inherited behaviour, memories are expressed in words, gestures, actions, facial expressions, posture and so forth, and it is via these bodily expressions that family traumas are visibly displayed. Family modes of representation mould individual memories as the present is created through an ongoing narrative re-construction of the past. The family, like the physical landmark of the Big House estates, is a site of memory, where the past remains alive in the present. Past traumas remain in the site of memory of the family and are therefore also transmitted inter-generationally. Freud suggests that repressed memories become active when an experience occurs that resembles the initial trauma (Freud 149). Madden depicts how memories cannot be forgotten but re-emerge, either later in the same family members, or in subsequent generations. She illustrates the doubling of memory by repeating aspects of the character's pasts in each other's memories, which produces a link between the memory and the experiences of the women, and therefore makes a comment on the repetitive nature of trauma. Freud posits how repressed traumatic memories gain access into consciousness through displacement, projection, or condensation, which filters the memory in a way that protects the psyche.⁶³ Madden's writing about memory suggests there are many ways in which memory can be repressed and many ways that it returns to the surface. By using Gothic tropes she highlights the return of the repressed national traumas by considering the family as a microcosm for the nation as a whole.

Madden like many of the writers in this study, acknowledges that the story of trauma is linked to narrative form. She prioritises how the protagonists tell the story of their parent's deaths and their inability to know the events. Jane has no memories of her parents, and nothing left of family life to engage with memories of her history. Her

⁶³ *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900); repeated in *Moses and Monotheism* (Freud, 1939a [1934-38] p94)

childhood is described with emphasis on the colour white, to show the blankness of the early pages of her life (Madden 1, 3, 11). It is shown as cold, clinical and loveless, and as such presents her with challenges within her emotional reactions in her adulthood. Jane's body is the only physical evidence of her parent's existence and it becomes both a site of memory for her and a site of the trauma of their loss:

It depressed her greatly that she had no memories of her parents. The fire in which they died had also destroyed all family photographs, and so she did not even know how her mother had looked. She would look at and touch her own body, telling herself that her mother had once existed in just such a form, but she could never really understand this. (Madden 7)

Jane thus experiences her body as a memorial to her parents, which creates immense problems for her sense of identity. It also highlights that trauma without narrative exists in the human body as a physical sensory experience. For Jane, who has a complete gap in witnessing or experience of her trauma, there is no connection to her loss, except through her own continued existence. When she accidentally sets fire to her arm with the chapel candles, Jane connects to her trauma and her burning body stands in for the missing bodies of her parents:

She was standing by a statue before which a row of little candles burned, and she looked white and shocked. Her right hand was wedged hard under her left arm, and she slowly rocked herself backwards and forwards. Through the french windows came voices and laughter as the other little girls and their parents took photographs in the garden. (Madden 6-7)

This day of family ritual brings Jane's orphaned state into the light and causes a repetition of her trauma. The burning of her hand may be a reference to Freud's burning child dream (as discussed in Beckett's chapter) and therefore is describing her recognition of the death of the parents through the return of the repressed traumatic memories on her physical body. She is able to connect to their deaths through the burning of her own body, which she conceives of as connected to their bodies. By repeating the moment of their death through her own burning flesh, Jane has engaged with the trauma of their death and her own abandoned condition.

Madden constructs the missing narrative of Jane's family by showing how Jane creates her own story to replace the gaps in her history. Madden highlights the unreliability of Jane's narrative, and indicated that Jane imagines people do not believe her story. Her embellishing of her past may be a form of repression in itself; if her telling of the story

is unbelievable, it cannot be accepted as true: “The circumstances of Jane’s early life were so tragic and romantic that at one time she drew solace from thinking that it might all be an elaborate fiction and that a happier truth would one day be revealed” (Madden 1). Jane hopes for a different truth to the reality of her life-story, thus suppressing the trauma she has experienced. She describes her story as a “careful mask” that she has deliberately constructed to protect herself from the pity of other girls who would then single her out as different, but as she becomes an adult she realises she has to “confront reality. Her life was simply a life, not a fairy-tale or a romantic novel, and it was perfectly possible to live long - to live all one’s life - never knowing anything but futility and misery” (Madden 11). When this occurs Jane has a dream of locked doors, white rooms and people staring at her through the glass of a darkened window. This signifies how she finds it difficult to identify her traumatised self with the world around her and this is the first instance of splitting in the novel as she awakens to see “her own hated face reflected back to her from the black glass” (Madden 11). Jane’s desire is to somehow project the darker part of her personality, the traumatised self, outside her own subjective identity. Melanie Klein in *Emotional Life of the Infant* (1952) suggests that from the earliest stages of life, a child responds to fantasies of annihilation, which have been procured from both the death instinct and projected rage arising from early frustrations, by supposing the self to be in terrible danger; thus good and bad are separated. Klein terms this the paranoid schizoid position and supposes it is a normal defence against anxiety or trauma in infancy. Processes of projective identification, splitting and idealisation are a way of making sense for the traumatised child. Projection occurs in an individual who wishes to remove the impulses, feelings and parts of the self that they reject, and thus wishes to place these negativities upon others by projecting them out and *onto* other persons. Jane’s meeting with James affords her an opportunity to achieve this splitting as it is through him that she meets Ellen, her doppelganger.

In adulthood Jane has a new experience of her body, which suggests she has retained a negative image of herself as a body in pain, and thus demonstrates how her body remains a site of traumatic memory. Jane’s childhood memories are dominated by the image of her aunt’s dressmaker’s dummy, stuck with pins, which she refers to as Judy. She becomes obsessed with this dummy, internalising it into her own body image as a female in pain. This negative image of pain and lifelessness, connects to Jane’s own understanding of her orphaned younger self:

Most frightening of all was her aunt's workroom, with its vicious treadle sewing machine, the long, cruel-looking shears and worst of all, the Judy: a huge headless, armless, legless thing of female shape, with long pins stuck into its baize breast. She thought it was an independent creature and imagined that every night it moved malevolently up and down the workroom. Yet because of its daytime stillness and solidity she also saw it as a dead thing. (Madden 2)

The young Jane's fear of her aunt's house is focused on this uncanny object.⁶⁴

Madden's descriptions of this dressmaker's doll can be understood as a reference towards Freud's discussion of Hoffmann's tale of "The Sand-Man", which Freud gives as an example of "the phenomenon of the 'double'" (Freud, *Uncanny* 386). Freud suggests we find uncanny, objects that may appear lifeless but have the appearance of being animate, as for example waxworks, dolls or automata. Freud is convinced that stories concerning doubling, animistic systems and those elements that work toward creating the uncanny, are stories describing the form and return of repressed traumas and desires. Jane's connection of her own body to the dummy would fall under the uncanny definition, and thus has implications for her traumatised sense of self. Freud suggests that such a doll is connected to the fear of death and sexual desires. Madden may well be similarly creating a link between her uncanny dressmaker's dummy, her character's fear towards her sexuality, and the death of her parents.

The image of the dummy returns again in the novel during a scene where Jane is standing with her work colleagues looking at a wedding dress in a shop window. They ask Jane if she would like to be married but Jane's reaction to the dummy expresses her fear of her sexuality and how the female form is linked to physical trauma:

Jane was still looking at the dress, conscious of the exaggerated shape of the dummy upon which it was draped, the bust too big and the waist too narrow to be natural. She imagined a row of clothes pegs running down the dummy's back, nipping in the excess material. [...] Shortly after that she began to develop sharp physical pains which apparently had no organic cause, but would strike at any time and in any part of her body. On several occasions she fainted. (Madden 12)

Jane is identifying her own body with the aunt's dummy and with this comes the physical trauma within her bodily connection to her parents' death. The fear of her sexuality and the negativity she has towards her adult feminine body may also be a

⁶⁴ *Hidden Symptoms* also references the uncanny with Theresa's discovery of a childhood doll with the colonial reference "Made in the Empire" stamped on its neck. The uncanny response Theresa has to its staring eyes acknowledges Freud's fear of death as she considers how the Troubles connects to her brother's death.

signal of the incestuous desires that are to come to light after Jane is married; her body is rejecting her sexual desire for a relationship that is taboo. Madden demonstrates this explicitly in another mirroring scene where she revisits the projection of the doppelgänger. In a pivotal scene in *Birds* Jane stands naked in front of a bathroom mirror, staring at her reflection:

She was shocked because she saw [her naked body] first distantly and objectively, as if it belonged to someone else, and then she knew that in that thought there was a wish and a refusal, knew too, that it was foolish. That strange woman's body with its breasts and the dark triangle of hair; that body, with all its implied, attendant feelings, that body bare as a corpse, was hers, and she had to claim it. But she could not bear to look and she turned away horrified. (Madden 13)

Jane cannot accept what she sees in the mirror; she disowns her body. Her inability to own her mirror double is a protection against her negative view of the female form. She cannot accept her physical body as part of her identity; it has become objectified in her eyes as something foreign, or other to herself. Instead of the life-giving female parts, she sees “a corpse”, which shows how her body remains a memorial to her parents' death: she cannot move beyond the trauma of their loss.

Mirrors play a large part in this novel and become the filter through which Jane chooses to see the world. Like Plato's cave people, Jane watches the world from the reflections in the mirror. She repeats her fracturing of the self into a mirror double in her first meeting with James as he sees, not her physical body, but her reflection in a mirror: “He was covertly staring at Jane (which she of course, saw clearly in the mirror). [...] She told her story as though it had all happened to someone else, and told it so well that he could not fail to be moved” (Madden 13-14). Just as Jane has previously fabricated her life-story, so she may be seen to be creating a doubling of herself by speaking to James indirectly through her mirror image. In this way she is distancing herself from her narrative of her past. What Jane does not discover until later is that his look of recognition towards her in the mirror was because she is a “double” for his childhood friend Ellen. James is not able to marry Ellen because she is his half-sister, through the affair his father had with Ellen's mother, so it is only through Jane, Ellen's double that he is able to legitimise their relationship in a way that would be socially and morally acceptable. The uncanny resemblance of the two women, although also doubled in their uncannily similar orphaned background, is not repeated in their personalities. When Jane first meets Ellen, “it was with spontaneous and mutual antipathy, staring at each

other with identical blue eyes” (Madden 48). Jane acknowledges a physical similarity with Ellen, but a disconnection on an emotional level so that, although they share a very similar past, they appear as opposites to one another. Ellen undermines Jane’s crafted image of her life: “Ellen bore a distinct physical resemblance to herself [...but] Jane felt she was listening to herself, and disbelieving the story of her own past life” (Madden 49). The uncanniness in their appearance, which suggests they may be twins, is subsequently referenced in a television show about twin sisters who, having been separated at birth, reunite and meet their “lost” brother (Madden 38). This combination of three siblings is similar to the pattern of Jane, Ellen and James, and Catherine, Sarah and Peter. Michael Parker suggests that the only way to ‘make sense’ of the story is to believe that incest has occurred in all three generations: “The motif of the inherited curse figures prominently in *The Birds of the Innocent Wood*, whose younger generation bear the indelible imprint of their parents’ histories” (Parker, *Shadows* 93). This is echoed in the three bird’s eggs in the nest from the Big House, which in itself doubles for the nest found by Jane. This nest returns throughout the narrative to link all three generations and families. When Jane dies, Sarah sees a nest in a museum and has a strange dream of Ellen’s mother:

Beside the nest was a scrap of yellowed paper, bearing in spiky black writing a date from the end of the last century, a woman’s name, and the name of an old demesne familiar to Sarah. Vividly she sees the demesne on a summer evening. The Woman is walking. She is wearing a long dress and her hair is pinned up in heavy coils. At a particular tree she stops, and, parting the branches, she reaches up behind soft young leaves to lift down an empty nest. (Madden 133)

This is an odd passage that suggests a generational flashback and thus Sarah’s vivid vision is a memory connecting her to Ellen’s family. The decision to pick up and keep the bird’s nest, which could be considered as a symbol of fertility and sexual desire, leads to several generations suffering the effects of trauma.

Madden continues throughout the novel to come back to the tropes of eggs, nests, shells and links these to memory, history, time and the past. She approaches the uncovering of traumatic memories through metaphors, therefore suggesting the filtering of the repressed memories through displacement. Jane actively attempts to forget the past, but realises that she cannot remove all traces of her traumatic memories.

On reaching the ledge she sat down [...] a long, pale sickle of sand separating the green sea from the green land, and she thought, *I’ll always remember this.*

She knew then that in this thought was the significance of the scene before her. Things had once happened of which she now had no memory, but what was known could never be unknown: it could only be forgotten. As a child she had wept for the want of memories, but now she saw that they could be a curse, chaining her to the past. If only she could forget all those years of longing to remember! Now she wished passionately that she could be a thing which had burst ignorant from an egg a second before; a thing that would live and at once forget and so be always new. (Madden 44)

Jane is acknowledging that she both has and does not have memories: she will remember that particular moment but she cannot remember other moments from her past. Jane is divided between wanting to remember and longing to forget. The imagery in this scene suggests doubling in its descriptions of divisions; the land and sea are divided, the past and present are divided, and Jane is divided between her longing for the memory of the past and a desire to escape from her memories. The connection of these emotions to the egg suggests her desire for rebirth from the past. It would appear contradictory to both the wish to have memories and the wish to be free from memories: Jane herself is divided. This division is physically embodied in her twin daughters. The twins echo the pattern of memory and forgetting, knowing and not-knowing, of the older generation. Catherine has chosen not to remember her recognition of the similarities between the two families, which suggests incest; she like her mother, has repressed her memories. Catherine links full awareness of the past to images connected with death:

Memory then would be no comfort but a trap, forcing her to live again and again things that should be long past. To have such a faculty would mean that lying here in bed would be to lie in a coffin, with the past shovelled on to her, as heavy and as dark as six foot of soil. (Madden 84)

To release the traumatic memories would be like a death to Catherine. The opening of the possibility of these memories brings physical pain to her body. Her body remembers the trauma even as her mind closes down the memory. Both Catherine and Jane consequently suffer the physical pain and scarring of trauma on their bodies that ends with their youthful deaths. Catherine, also like her mother, appears to have gaps in her memory of her childhood: "Because of her bad memory, Catherine keeps a diary, stout as a ledger, with marbled endpapers. In this she contains her past. Sarah now thinks that it is a good idea to keep a diary as comprehensive as this, for it gives Catherine a degree of power over her life" (Madden 23). Not only does this difference in memory serve to enhance the dichotomy of the twins, but it suggests how each twin relates to time: Sarah

is part of the past, but has a fear of the future, while Catherine refuses to look at the past and lives in the present day alone. Catherine entombs the past in stories which she writes in the “marbled endpapers” of her diary. Sarah sees this as a way of not only containing the past but of having “a degree of power over her life”: like her mother Jane, Catherine is creating the narrative of her life. The last lines of the first chapter ends with Jane divided between hope for change and feeling trapped: “she felt that she was caught in a space and a stillness which was beyond time, so that every tick was not another second, but the same second repeated, and repeated. [...] She could hear the wild birds clearly as they cried out across the water” (Madden 20). This final sentence is repeated as the first sentence of the next chapter, where the birds, like Madden’s other image clusters, link Jane’s experiences with her daughter’s memories. Madden creates this image to show the divisions of memory and identity collapsing within each generation living, not sequentially but in a circular repetition of the previous generation’s experiences.

Madden uses the gothic re-working of mythology as part of her metaphorical framework. The imagery of birds in the novel is linked to religion, history and the supernatural. Jane’s responses to the birds changes in the novel from feelings of dread and fear, to times when she finds their song comforting and she can develop an affinity. Birds in Celtic mythology have an ambiguous meaning and could be seen as either messengers of good or evil, as their ability to fly created a link between heaven and earth, thus giving them powers either as harbingers of death, to carry a person’s soul to heaven or bringing good fortune from the gods. Irish folklore has specific interpretation for different species of birds, which are often invested with the power to shape-shift into people and can be seen as symbols for the returning of the dead.⁶⁵ Madden links birds to images of shells, eggs and nests, which symbolise not only future life, but past generations. She uses the image of the bird’s nest, a common metaphor for desire and fecundity, in a similar fashion to Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* in that the nest is transformed from a positive image of love and sexuality, to an omen of death.⁶⁶ Jane’s revulsion for the birds is linked to her fear of the sound of their cries, which are like the calling of the dead across the lake. She has an uncanny reaction to the wild birds and

⁶⁵ Morrigan for example appeared as a crow sitting on the shoulder of Cuchulainn’s shoulder after his death in the Ulster Cycles.

⁶⁶ In Catherine’s bedchamber the removal of the pigeon feathers from her pillow alludes to the superstition that such feathers would bring good health to a person suffering from sickness and are a reference to her desire for death. They indicate Catherine’s forthcoming death and her affinity with ancient folklore as she waits for the birds to carry her spirit back to the moors.

even to the farmyard birds. Madden refers to the bird's nest twice in her novel, once in the extract concerning the Big House and the other in a scene following the death of James's father: "The nest contained three fledglings, whose red beaks gaped for food" (Madden 79-80). The birds may be metaphors for any one of the combinations of relationships or a sign of the next generation (Peter, Sarah and Catherine). They are also a symbol of hope for Jane, which is in stark contrast to the museum nest with blown eggs signifying death and the preservation of the past. Madden's choice of juxtaposition in the title of the adjective "innocent" beside "woods" rather than beside "birds" suggests a lack of innocence in the birds. By taking into consideration that the birds may be symbols of the past, present or future generations, the suggestion is that trauma does not just die with the individual but continues to impact second and third generations.

The overlapping of Ellen and Jane's stories suggests a desire to romanticise or create a story from the gap produced by the trauma. Eric Santner (1990) suggests that a narrative response to trauma can either take the form of a story that supplants the sense of loss or trauma, or one that acknowledges the trauma by repeating it in a symbolic form. A narrative that evokes mourning may need to involve strategies that allow the person or group to "filter" the force of the trauma into forms that are not damaging to the psyche. It may be that Ellen and Jane are the same person, split, as the images in the mirror had been, into a self that lives in the everyday world and one that lives in the dark otherworld of the mirror. It is for example, possible to read the four women in *Birds* as embodying Santner's rejection of "the need for mourning by simulating a condition of intactness, typically by situating the site and origin of loss elsewhere" and therefore postponing the "the burden of having to reconstitute one's self-identity under 'posttraumatic', conditions" (Santner: Friedlander 144). This places the emotional response to trauma outside the psyche and therefore there are no post-trauma symptoms. Sarah embodies this response as she is described as refusing to see the path her life has taken and the traumas that surround her. Catherine on the other hand is aware that there are traumas surrounding her family but she filters these through her focus on her sister's relationship rather than on her own diseased body. Catherine therefore is creating "works of mourning" for her dead mother and the end of her hopes for her own future, but has projected outward the grief and pain she feels. The doubling that Madden creates can thus be explained as Catherine's and, or Ellen's, attempts to displace their emotional trauma onto an alter ego. Madden's choice of Gothic tropes supports this: as

William Patrick Day suggests in *Circles of Fear and Desire*, the Gothic tale does not attempt to explore identity in order to build meaning, but exposes the complete breakdown and destruction of identity, “destroyed beyond repair, a fable of impossibility of identity” (Day 6). The connection between the two women, embodies the fragmenting of the subject in trauma between the consciously known and the unconscious memories of the trauma. Melanie Klein’s projective identification involves a deep split, an eradication of unpalatable parts of the self *into* rather than *onto*, someone else. Madden’s characters project their repressed desires and traumas onto their doubles. The double identity collapses as the Other becomes subsumed in the Self in the destructive quest for self-knowledge.

The orphaning of Jane is the central trauma of the novel and therefore connects the narrative to the repression of the acknowledgement of their deaths. In his essay on *The Uncanny* Freud discusses the ancient Egyptian art of making images of the dead as a way of keeping the dead alive. The double therefore can be viewed as a fear of death and the return of the repressed memory of death. Freud states:

one possesses knowledge, feeling and experience in common with the other, identifies himself with another person, so that his self becomes confounded, or the foreign self is substituted for his own – in other words by doubling, dividing and interchanging the self. And finally there is the constant recurrence of similar situations, a same face, or character-trait, or twist of fortune, or a same crime, or even a same name recurring throughout several consecutive generations. (Freud 386-387)

Freud thus describes the double as occurring in a variety of forms, from an actual physical double to a psychological or emotional double. He also notes that doubling can be cross-generational and can be situational rather than attached to characteristics. He notes that the portrayal of doubles produces a division of the self into an objective other, who has similar “knowledge, feeling and experience”. All of these examples can be found in many of Madden’s novels in one form or another.⁶⁷ In an interesting extrapolation of the double Coughlan points to the death of one cousin in ‘The Murdered Cousin’ as a way of removing the divided self: “one half of a notional composite self must be sacrificed for the life of the other” (Coughlan 32). This leads to a consideration of the deaths in *Birds*. Catherine (and her mother Jane) who are not

⁶⁷ Several examples of Madden’s doubling are found in her fragmentation of characters such as in *Hidden Symptoms*, *Remembering Light and Stone*, *One By One in the Darkness* and *Birds*. In addition to these the character’s experiences are also doubles, as are the images and even to some extent the novels themselves.

involved in incestuous relationships, both become ill and die while the guilty double remains alive. Ellen and Jane are doubles where one is the knowledgeable/ conscious part and the other unconscious/ innocent of knowledge. This is paralleled in the twins Sarah and Catherine. Other evidence in the novel suggests the overlapping of Sarah and Ellen, and Catherine and Jane, for example in their physical descriptions, personalities and their experiences. Madden is thus utilising the Gothic trope of the double in multiple ways, all of which work to defamiliarise the reader from traditional literary representations of history; she is referencing the postcolonial fissures and fragmentation of identity that can occur from trauma. Madden therefore conflates, through Ellen and Jane's life-stories, personal and generational history within Ireland's colonial past.

Jane's life-story embraces a fairy-tale quality, which echoes gothic romance genres in such a way that Madden appears to be specifically referencing *Jane Eyre*: Jane shares the same name and orphaned state, and as a young girl she is trapped under the dutiful but loveless care of her aunt, suffers from sickness, is sent to a religious school and finds herself in a house full of secrets. There are similarities in the burning of the Big House, which brings an end to the colonial, but leaves those who remain scarred by its existence. As Gilbert and Gubar have pointed out *Jane Eyre* is a story about doubling, both within the narrative itself, and with Jane as Charlotte's double expressing her rage against literary patriarchy. Madden may be referencing this story to bring the hidden traumas of colonialism to the foreground and to show, through her use of doubling, how there is a lost narrative behind that period of Irish history. Just as Bronte's Bertha is recognised as the colonial other hidden behind the story of Rochester's wealth, so Madden may be pointing to the hidden traumas in Irish colonialism. The use of doubles in *Birds* could therefore be exploring the fragmentation caused by colonial, national and individual trauma: the plot of *Birds* and its use of imagery and Gothic tropes creates space for a reading that can support both individual and social trauma. By using these however, Madden is also questioning narrative form. Jane cannot prevent herself from changing Ellen's story, just as she did her own with romanticised gothic tropes: "the revolver and the gazebo were gothic fancies which Jane could not resist adding" (Madden 52). The Gothic here is questioning the validity of Jane's narrative and the impact of literature or narrative in shaping memories of the past. Jane incorporates Ellen's story as if it is part of her own life-story:

Jane listened attentively and later she would run over it again and again in her own mind, embellishing the tale with little added details of her own, imagining

certain scenes with particular intensity. Every time she saw Ellen thereafter, she would think of what she knew, conscious always that it was partly truth and partly her own invention. (Madden 50-1)

Jane's embellishment of the narrative suggests Madden's critique of trauma narratives, where the full nature of the event can never be known. Ellen's story not only incorporates Jane's inventions, thus making Ellen's story also Jane's story, but it holds the story of the end of the Ascendancy. By witnessing to Ellen's traumatic memories, Jane now understands the significance of the burnt-out shell she has seen close to her home. Unlike Johnston, who suggests the mutual witnessing of one another's traumas can bring an empathetic release, Madden appears to be suggesting there may be an appropriation of the trauma by incorporating another's trauma into the subject's own narrative: that the story of the Anglo-Irish has become re-written in Irish history, taking on the nostalgia and romanticism with which it has embellished its own history. She is pointing to the separate, yet overlapping traumas of all who lived through the colonial period.

Conclusion

Johnston and Madden both utilise the Big House and Irish Gothic genre to show the clash between traditional and modern Ireland. Their novels show an overlap in theme and narrative styles, in their choice of genre, use of metaphor, and characterisation. The main focus of their novels is to show how trauma impacts female subjectivity. Madden highlights this lack of subjectivity through Jane's inability to accept the body she sees in the mirror. The connection of her body to the traumatic loss of her parents, leads her to objectify her physical body into a separated reflection, in the same way as she segregates the narrative of her traumatic childhood by creating a romanticised story of her life. Johnston similarly portrays Laura's fragmented and damaged image of her physical body and sense of self, and her inability to converge her past with her present self. The sites of the traumas are important in both these novels as they become places to express the emotional rejection of the past. The physical body, the family home, the summerhouse and family estate are sites holding the memories of trauma. The convergence between external and internal is emphasised by Madden in the descriptions of places; the cold, white attic of her aunt's house, the long, bright corridor of the convent and particularly of the farmhouse, which is darkly lifeless and where time is stagnant. Outside the farmhouse is a vast space filled with the sounds of birds, which

take manifold symbolic roles in the novel as they form an emotional thermometer for the responses of the key characters to their memories. By connecting the farmhouse, the cottage and the demesne to the Big House, Madden widens her exploration of trauma beyond the individuals and their family, and into the collective trauma of a nation. Johnston overtly connects the summerhouse and Laura's ancestral estate with the political changes and the continuing influence of Ireland's colonial past. Both these writers have found within the Gothic Big House genre a means of exploring themes and tropes that explicate the traumas of Irish colonial history, which has rippled down through the generations into modern day political divisions.

Madden and Johnston's writing expresses a move away from direct portraits of the Troubles to attempt metaphorical engagements of the long-term impact of trauma. This is in keeping with Northern Irish literature and theory in the latter half of the Troubles, which can be seen to be searching for ways to engage with prolonged exposure to violence and trauma. Writing from this time was processing over a decade of unrest, while examining both causes and solutions. The influence of the growing interest in postcolonial studies in Irish literature South of the border can also be seen in the North, as for example in the founding work of the Field Day Company. These influences can be seen in Madden and Johnston's writing as they engage with Ireland's colonial past through genres that have a historical connection to the Ascendancy period. In addition to this theoretical change, these authors exemplify the changes to form that were emerging in prose writing. They express individual and national trauma through their use of narrative structure, as for example in their depiction of how the characters and the plot cannot be contained within definable boundaries. Where there are descriptions of containment, there are also descriptions of entrapment, confinement, or imprisonment. In the main, the characters and events flow into one another to create a sense of the uncanny; the horror of what cannot be contained. Jerry White defines Madden's writing as "transnational" and points to the constant engagement in her work with identity and place: "her persistent concerns are the fluidity and instability of personal and cultural identity, and the even trickier question of the relationship between the two" (White 451). Rachel Sealy Lynch describes Johnston as "fascinated with oppositions and tensions" and "enduringly interested in crossing borders of all types" (Lynch: Kirkpatrick 250). Johnston complicates the boundaries between her characters by suggesting that the story of one character can amalgamate with the narrative of another character. Madden's metaphorical use of mirrors plays with the notion of boundaries as

the self becomes fluid. Both writers therefore suggest a connection between the ways that trauma and postcolonialism break down, fragment and influence identity on an individual and a national level. They use their characters, setting and plot to explore the fluidity of definitions, identity and history. In addition, they engage with the long term impact of the layering of traumatic events, to show a growing need to find new ways to explicate these decades. This becomes even more demanding during the following decade as the political climate changes with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement.

Chapter Five: The Retrospective Voice Of Anna Burns.

Anna Burns: An Introduction to the Author

Little is known of Anna Burns' biography beyond the basic facts that she was born in Belfast in 1962 and moved to London's Notting Hill in 1987. This may be in part due to Burns' reluctance to give personal information, typified in her interview with Lisa Gee for the *Orange Prize for Fiction* (2002) where she side-stepped questions about the background and influences that may have shaped *No Bones*. For example, when asked about the creation of Amelia's character, Burns' short reply was: "She sprang from destruction and violence, loads of fear, and a misunderstanding of love" (Burns: Gee 2002).⁶⁸ Similarly when Gee asked Burns if the novel in any way reflected her own experiences the abrupt reply was "closely"; she proceeded instead to summarise the difficulties of finding a narrative form that was capable of reflecting difficult emotional realities: "The book reflects the feeling reality rather than necessarily what happened."⁶⁹ Burns prefers to turn the questions back onto her novel, which I argue in this chapter can be read as much more than a form of biography as it moves into an analysis of the political events of the decades of the Troubles.

Burns' first novel *No Bones* won the 2001 Royal Society of Literature for Regional Novels Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize, and was shortlisted for the 2002 Orange Prize for Fiction alongside previous 1996 winner Helen Dunmore, Maggie Gee, Chloe Hooper, Sarah Waters and the winner Ann Patchett. Despite this acclaim, the novel received mixed reviews; critics find the depiction of violence difficult to read and Burns' writing style is not always understood. Lisa Darnell in her review of *No Bones* for *The Guardian* (2001) describes it as "difficult to stomach" because of the "relentless outbreaks of violence - both political and domestic".⁷⁰ This highlights both the ways in which the novel achieves Burns' goal to reproduce the impact of the traumas, and also how Burns has commented not only on the political violence seeping into the home, but how it impacts upon family relations and is reproduced as domestic violence. The tragically high incidence of violence against women and children in Northern Ireland is

⁶⁸ <www.orangeprize.co.uk/2002prize/shortlist/burnsi.html>

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/aug/18/fiction.reviews1>>

an important subject that has remained sadly under-represented, and novels such as Burns' can help bring it into public discussion. Darnell's reaction is echoed in several reviews of the novel, including Noddy Holder's review for her Orange Prize as he also describes the effect of the book in physical terms: "The subject matter of the book, by its very nature, is not always easy to stomach."⁷¹ In addition Holder expresses the difficulty involved in reading a novel by a writer who has experienced growing up in a similar troubled area of Belfast and therefore realising it describes a historical and, for some, a continuing reality. Holder states:

I really hope that *No Bones* is not based too closely on the life of the author. For a person to witness just one gross act of violence in their life would be bad enough, but in the life of the book's main character, Amelia, depraved and sickening death and destruction is a routine occurrence. [...] Despite all we know of the events in Northern Ireland in the last thirty-odd years this realisation somehow still comes as a shock.⁷²

Perhaps Burns' withholding of biographical information is a way of preventing the closing down of interpretations of her novel into autobiographical interpretations and therefore allowing it to speak as a representation, not only of the Northern Troubles but of more universal themes concerning the impact of violence and trauma.

Not all reviewers have difficulty with Burns' writing, and further from home her ways of capturing the violent effects of the Troubles are appreciated as they forge new perspectives and ways of accessing a difficult subject matter. Roger Boylan's overview of Troubles Writing in the *Boston Review* (2008) places Burns ahead of her contemporaries:

Of these it is Anna Burns—with her searing, jaunty style, and the way in which she uses family life as a microcosm of Ulster—who is at the forefront of the modern Northern writers of either sex or sect. Her 2001 debut novel *No Bones* presents life under the Troubles whole and unadorned, and manages, like the North itself, to be ghastly and delightful at the same time.⁷³

Boylan understands the need for gaps in a novel he places within the Irish comic tradition of Flann O'Brien. He suggests that what is most striking about the novel is Burns' ability to recreate a sense of place: "Burns wears the mantle of the *dinnseanchas*,

⁷¹ <http://www.orangeprize.co.uk/2002prize/shortlist/bonesr.html>

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ <http://bostonreview.net/roger-boylan-intimate-revenge-the-troubles-ireland>

in Celtic lore the namer of places, the reader of landscapes, in which a place is more than just a setting or backdrop, almost a character in itself.”⁷⁴ In addition he points to the omnipresent atmosphere of fear and the need to know the language and codes of the area, which dictates the character’s choices and actions. Boylan is one of the critics who looks below the surface of the emotion in the prose to decipher the truths that they represent. At the *Perth International Writer's Festival* (2003) Burns highlighted the nature of these truths when she spoke about, “ the impact in Northern Ireland of a level of violence that has become ordinary and has turned into the cultural norm” (Koval 2003).⁷⁵ Burns once again foregrounds her aim to defamiliarise the reader and enable the trauma of the violence to be understood in ways that other forms of writing would be unable to access.

Burns’ second novel *Little Constructions*, although equally challenging in style and content, appears to have gained more success in its reviews, perhaps because it is more overtly farcical in style. Lucy Ellmann’s review of *Little Constructions* in *The Guardian* (2007) is one of the more positive reviews of Burns’ writing, understanding her use of irony, postmodern techniques and grotesque humour as necessary devices for unlocking the subject matter: “The writing is energetic, convoluted and courageous. It has a gutsy nervousness that matches the subject matter as if there is no way to write about violence and violation other than with comedy, digression, wordplay and other peculiarities.”⁷⁶ The themes in *Little Constructions* are less historically bound than in *No Bones* and the lack of situating detail releases the reader from empathetic engagement with the main characters. In this way the reader can review the themes of the novel without emotional horror at the violence. Helen Brown in her review of the novel for *The Telegraph* (2007) argues that *Little Constructions* is no less a reflection on the Troubles despite its lack of references to real places. She points out that what is dominant in this novel is less sectarian violence than its impact in increasing violence, both physical and sexual, within the family:

It becomes evident that the Doe gang are a fictional faction of the IRA: men who scare themselves silly over little wee women while forgetting about the torture victims they've left bound at the kitchen table. It's the domesticity of the violence that's so difficult to take, and the collusion of women and children in it. For the beatings don't end with the informers. They also take in the wives and

⁷⁴ ibid

⁷⁵ <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/booksandwriting/desmond-barry--anna-burns/3630648>

⁷⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/jun/09/featuresreviews.guardianreview20>

girlfriends and daughters. All the women who've been assured "never you" are waiting for the inevitable hand at the throat, boot in the ribs, knife in the womb.⁷⁷

Recent reports from Northern Ireland, such as Valerie Morgan's 1996 lecture, have highlighted the fact that violence in the family is greater in countries which are involved in violent wars and comment on the need for women's groups to campaign for legislation and to re-examine how women's voices have been represented during the post-conflict years. Morgan suggests that sociological factors along with cultural representations have left women vulnerable to physical, structural and cultural forms of violence. With this in mind, novels such as those produced by Burns are important for stimulating discussions surrounding the continuing impact of violence on a nation that has been subjected to decades of violence.

Just as Burns' biographical history is relatively unknown, her writing similarly has eluded critical analysis. It is only since her second novel that she has begun to be included in databases of Irish writers, which contain sparse information that highlights how little critical attention has been applied to her writing. This is surprising considering how ground-breaking and important her writing is in its postmodern, post-Good Friday Agreement interpretation of the Troubles. Unlike her contemporaries her writing appears to have made very little impact on the literati who are torn between praising her experimental style and commenting on the disturbing world she creates. However, Burns' writing has begun to receive some attention for its unusual stylistic representations of violence. Matthew Schultz's 2011 essay "'Give it Welcome': Gothic inheritance and the Troubles in Contemporary Irish Fiction" is an interesting analysis of Burns' use of ghostly hauntings which he considers as, "a manifestation of psychological trauma caused by the inherited curse of transgenerational violence in Ireland."⁷⁸ Just as Madden and Johnston return to Gothic tropes to explore the re-emergence of the past traumas in the present day, Schultz is creating a reading of Burns' novel that allows for a similar understanding of the past as a re-emerging presence in everyday present-day events. Schultz's interesting reading of Belfast as a Gothic nightmare allows him to draw comparisons between Burns' novel and the combination of psychological terror and sensational machinations at work in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. By noting this comparison, Schultz is able to interpret the ghostly hauntings in Burns'

⁷⁷ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/3666282/Why-cant-women-be-gunshops.html>

⁷⁸ <irishgothichorrorjournal.homestead.com/schultz.html>

novel as an expression of socio-political unrest: “Burns keys in on the Gothic mechanics of inheritance in which families sacrifice their children to the transgenerational conflict.”⁷⁹ This, he suggests, is her reason for introducing children into her novel, particularly in the ghostly scene of Amelia’s breakdown in Camden Town. As Schultz concludes, analysing the use of Gothic tropes in Irish literature can allow for a theoretical framework to discuss the historical traumas and traditional cultural myths that are still capable of haunting the present day with violence and political unrest.

A further interesting critique of *No Bones* is performed by Fiona McCann in an essay which contrasts Burns’ novel with Anne Devlin’s short story “Naming the Names”. McCann focuses on the ways in which both writers have represented the female terrorists in their novels and asks whether they have found ways to destabilise the divisions that separate mother from monster (McCann 70). McCann focuses her attention on the character of Bronagh McCabe, whom she points out is associated from her earlier appearances with the male-dominated world of violence. McCann highlights Bronagh’s inability to work with the women in the offices of the youth training programme and the gender discrimination which attempts to force her to accept her femininity (McCann 75). McCann suggests that this scene, taken alongside Bronagh’s raping of Amelia, places Bronagh into the role of a male character. Thus, instead of breaking gender stereotypes, McCann suggests that this positioning reinforces essentialist divisions: “On the surface, what lurks behind this blending of the mother, monster, and whore imagery is the suggestion that in order to commit acts of violence, women must adopt aggressive (and stereotypically masculine) characteristics” (McCann 76). However McCann notes that this is not the only way of reading this character, as the reader is constantly distanced through the unreliable interpretation of Amelia’s framing of events. McCann points to the importance of portraying female terrorists as a challenge to the stereotyping of dominant male and female victim. As her work suggests more notice needs to be given to writers who, by breaking out of traditional genres and character representation, give voice to a wider spectrum of women’s experiences.

Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter contrasts with the preceding chapters in that Anna Burns’ *No Bones* (2001) and *Little Constructions* (2007) were both written after the Good Friday Agreement,

⁷⁹ *ibid*

which officially began the political process that signified the end of the Troubles.⁸⁰ Burns therefore constructs her writing retrospectively in what could be described as a post-trauma period: she is producing a view of the Troubles from a liminal space of changing perspectives where Northern Ireland is attempting to define its future and its past. *No Bones* engages with the traumatic events spanning the entire three decades of the Troubles by functioning on several levels to relate the results of violent trauma on the main characters, but also to re-think public knowledge of historical moments and to comment on how the traumas of certain years impacted the collective psyche. One key aspect of Burns' engagement with trauma is the degree to which she explores it through her choice of narrative style. She meshes together the real with a hyper-realist style and fantastical elements, moving from rational depictions to bizarre surreal worlds, with caricatures, psychotic episodes, and fantastical situations. By applying Freudian and Bakhtinian theories to her writing it is possible to gain an understanding of how her experimental writing opens up new meanings, not only of an identity in crisis, but of how history and self respond to trauma. Burns utilises both the uncanny and the grotesque in her references to individual and collective traumas, which allows for a reading alongside the trauma theories of Caruth and Edkins. Caruth's work on the unknowability of trauma and the subsequent issues of witnessing can be applied to Burns' writing, as can Edkins' concerns about public forms of commemoration of historic events and her work on trauma time. What Burns ultimately achieves in her writing, principally with respect to *No Bones*, is a meshing together of the personal and the public as she explores how the individual within a particular socio-political context processes traumatic memory.

In both of Burns' novels dysfunctional family life mirrors the dysfunctional violence of the surrounding community to show how invasive and insidious political violence can be on the supposedly private world of the family, and ultimately on the individual. Burns explores gender by creating fragmented character, unreliable narration, disjointed plotlines and innovative stylistics. She suggests of the violent world she depicts, "you have to become disconnected and/or delusional in order to survive" and this is captured within her characters (Burns: Gee 2002). The bizarre unreality of sections of her story, works to highlight the madness of the reality they underpin. The inclusion in her narrative of the traumatic impact of the Troubles on young children becomes an

⁸⁰Burns has also written several short stories as for example "Wanted", which is an ironic look at violent relationships through its overt play on female vulnerability and male domination and is published online in *This is ... The Poisoned Chalice* (Issue 2, 2004).

examination of a specific kind of trauma: a war in which all binarisms break down to create a space where the boundaries of the public and private become blurred, where a child could be both a target and a threat, and a neighbour or relative, either an ally or an enemy. Burns describes her novel as “reflect[ing] the feeling reality rather than necessarily what happened” (Burns: Gee 2002). This “feeling reality” is in essence the responses of the community and the individual to the ongoing trauma and thus requires a very different style of writing, which helps the reader to bridge the gap of unknowability in trauma narration. Burns actively seeks non-linear and symbolical forms that encourage open readings of the past. During trauma it is possible to refuse official stories by ‘encircling’ the trauma in a non-linear narrative to produce new ideas, concepts and ways of seeing. In many respects it is the subject matter that appears to dictate the need to move beyond realism to grasp the emotional and traumatic elements at the heart of these stories.

Little Constructions

Anna Burns’ *Little Constructions* (2007) is her second novel, which develops her exploration of family trauma by acknowledging the continuous intergenerational influence of trauma. The similarities of theme and style make this novel an interesting contrast to her first novel *No Bones* and explicate Burns’ development of ways of narrating trauma. From the opening chapter the narrator introduces two important facts: first the nature of the Doe family, who are associated with violence and psychosis, and secondly the nature of violence in war. The traumatised family is a re-occurring theme in Burns’ writing, “how violence can emerge and be perpetuated and passed on” (Burns: Gee 2002). The plot is continually twisting out of control through the interruptions of the different alter egos of the two key characters and their various counterparts. There are multiple characters from the same family who overlap in both name and behaviour, thus embodying the fragmentation of identity of the traumatised protagonist. The Doe family who are described by Tom as “a family of neuroses, psychoses and Edgar Allen Poe horror stories” all have names beginning with the same letter (Burns 56). They consist of Jotty, Jetty, Janine, JanineJoshuatine, JanineJuliaJoshuatine, Janet, Jennifer, Julie, John, Johnjoe, Joe, JerryJudges, John Doe’s son who is not given a name but is known as “the Leaders son”, and “others only socially connected with the Doe family also went under that umbrella” (Burns 31, 32). There are moments when the author-

narrator intervenes in the story to comment upon the characters and to warn the reader that they are not being told the truth, or indeed are being deliberately misled:

Cough. Splutter. Sneeze sneeze. Attention attention. I had to cough and splutter there to indicate these two people weren't telling the truth about the subject of bickering. They were pretending the whole subject was whether guns were good or not. As if that mattered. As if, in the name of God, such a thing as that mattered. I think by now you must know what it is I'm really talking about. (Burns 51)

The reader ironically does not always know what is happening and it is only with hindsight that some scenes can be understood at all in the confusion of characters and the telling of the plot. The narrative point of view stays mainly with the unknown narrator as the perspective moves from omnipotence to the viewpoint of a character. This creates humour in the ironic distancing between the character's perspective or viewpoint and that of the reader. Jotty Doe suffers from depression due to her repressed memories of incest and multiple rape and Tom Cusack (also known as Gunshop Tom Spaders) has severe dissociation and multiple personality disorder. Gunshop Tom introduces the story as he dialogues with his double, Customer Tom. Tom is said to be in his mid-thirties, which if the novel was to be read metaphorically in a similar fashion to Burns' previous novel *No Bones*, could suggest he is a metaphorical representation of Northern Ireland. The claustrophobic and surreal setting of *Tiptoe Under Greystone* works in a similar way to her use of Irish places in her final chapter of *No Bones*, as it references real places. Greystone Cliff is near Bray (south of Dublin) with views over both the sea and the Wicklow hills and has associations with historical traumas, thus it doubles for the cliffs mentioned in the final chapter of *No Bones*: "All crimes in such places got connected with the war, lumped together with the war, as if they were a part of it, as if they were because of it, and this happened whether they were because of it or not" (Burns 2-3). The narrator is challenging the impact of war upon society and the political purposes that are too often attached to violence. Nothing in this novel is straightforward or definable and in this way it is comparable with the chapters of *No Bones* where Burns turns to look at trauma.

No Bones

No Bones is written in twenty-three chapters covering the years 1969-1994, thus spanning the Troubles, with each chapter chronologically depicting the impact of this

period on the main protagonist, Amelia Lovett and her family and neighbours from the Ardoyne area of Belfast. The title of the novel refers to an area in the Ardoyne known as The Bone around which this novel is set, but it also suggests the nature of the traumatic events depicted by suggesting the absence of memorialising of the dead whose bones have yet to be laid to rest. The first half of the novel works toward showing how historical events culminate in the explosion of violence; how the political, public arena and the private domestic spaces have no boundaries, but instead roll through one another until they lose any sense of separate definitions. It also introduces the problems of narrating through traumatised individuals. The latter part of the novel takes the reader into the long-term impact of living with trauma: the alcohol abuse, drugs, violent behaviour, paranoia, phobias, and so on. As the novel progresses the scenes become more bloody and horrific, while the narration becomes more abstract and absurd. The majority of the plot is narrated from Amelia's perspective to show a childhood scarred by erratically violent behaviour and death. Burns' experimental style moves from straightforward realist sections of dialogue into surreal worlds where characters divide to converse with ghosts and inner voices. The development of the narrative from child-like narration towards the grotesque, gothic horror, and the absurd means that *No Bones* stands out from other novels about the Troubles. Burns can be seen to follow a counter-tradition in Irish writing of exploring socio-political issues through form, as for example in the works of James Joyce, Flann O'Brien and Patrick McCabe. The exploration of identity and history is complicated because it is an exploration of a traumatised identity and history. The fracturing of self and past that occurs during trauma produces a lack of signification, which has led Burns to utilise narrative technique to examine trauma. Her texts exemplify the problems of not knowing and create a fluid narrative that acknowledges the gaps in personal and social understanding while challenging the standardised public representations of events through the unreliable perspective of her characters. A close reading of the plot along historic lines would suggest it also moves into a metaphorical exposé, which defamiliarises key historic events. Burns principally achieves this through the narration of psychotic episodes experienced by her unusual characters and with her use of the grotesque, the uncanny, and carnivalesque. An analysis of her novel will therefore need to focus on how her narrative techniques work to engage with the traumatised self and historical traumas.

Time, place, and memory are highlighted from the very beginning of *No Bones* as the novel opens with the phrase: "The Troubles started on a Thursday. At six o'clock at

night. At least that's how Amelia remembered it" (Burns 1). Amelia as a young girl, and later a traumatised adult, is an unreliable narrator, but it is her lack of clarity that brings the events into sharp focus by questioning the ways in which they are witnessed. The events which signify the beginning of the Troubles are removed from the reader, as they are told by Amelia, with her friend Bossy's words, using phrases she has overheard from her parents, who are in turn repeating conversations they have gleaned from television footage and gossip:

She cheered up and according to her, and she may of course, have been adding on imagery, her ma told her da, after listening to the news and talking to the neighbours, that riots were going to happen and that, if there was any stored-away hardware – that meant guns, Bossy explained – then this was the time most certainly to get it out. (Burns 2-3)

The children hear this news on a sunny morning when playing in the street and although at first they believe it to be too far removed from their own lives, however after seven days Amelia's life changes when the violence literally arrives in her doorstep. The women use their domestic tools as weapons against the male voices threatening outside the door. The women and children are locked up inside the house, with a hose on the kitchen tap in case of fire, the letter box and windows covered in heavy boards. Amelia sleeps fully clothed on mattresses under the table while her twelve year old brother, with his friend Jat, stand guard with buckets of water, sticks, knives, bricks and pokers. These are the indicators of war, which signify the time before and the time after war starts. The golden innocence of children playing, like the golden days before the start of the First World War, is glorified as a perfect summer that sits in stark contrast to the new reality. Trapped inside their home, the women and children are caught in an air of expectancy. This trope is reinforced with the cluster of birthing metaphors; Amelia's mother is pregnant, as is their dog, and along with Amelia's collection of caterpillars, they signal changes ahead. The house itself becomes an image of the womb or pupae preparing its inhabitants for their new life.

In the upside down house, Amelia and her sister's games have changed from fairy-stories to guessing where the bombs are exploding and who might be shot next. Amelia, who has watched her neighbors burned out of their houses, has tried to make sense of this new world by counting the number of houses between the burnt out shells along her street and her own home. She reassures her family they have some time to go, "according to her sums and the laws of rationality", but this is an irrational time and her

house is attacked that night (Burns 4). At this point it is still a game for Amelia, but once the assault begins in earnest upon their home, she can no longer pretend. As the boards and windows are smashed, voices call through the letterbox, and the dog attacks Amelia in a misplaced attempt to defend the house. At this point Amelia becomes overwhelmed: “Then Amelia forgot. She fell back under the table and to worrying, terrible worrying. [...] She fell asleep. She dreamt she bought an apple from an applecart that was sitting at the bottom of her street, which was Herbert Street.” In the morning Amelia finds everyone gone and all is quiet but she falls “asleep again, then awoke again, then fell asleep, then awoke proper” (Burns 7, 8). This is Amelia’s first encounter with the possibility of harm falling upon her and her family. It is her first realisation that the threat of death is real; it is her first experience of trauma. In keeping with Caruth’s theory of unknowability, Burns depicts Amelia’s inability to experience the trauma. Amelia “forgets” and moves into a symbolic dreamlike trance where she imagines the devil turning into a stripy red spider and tricking her with apples and a list of her sins. These images suggest her fear of death and how the young girl has transformed these unknowable emotions into unreal character representations of her fears. Her engagement with these fears is her only memory of what happened that night. The actual events are missed by Amelia whose repeated sleeping fits represent the moments of the trauma, so that what has actually happened remains as an inexperience, unknown through its lack of signification. Burns has left a gap in her narrative of that night with only the disturbed house as indications of the changes for the family.

In traumatic events memory is characterised as being unlike the event itself, in that there is a lack of signification available for processing, interpreting or witnessing the trauma. Even as the moment of trauma occurs, it is lost in the gap between the event and its interpretation. As Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (2003) highlight in their work on memory, traumatic memory lacks the ability to find expression in the way that other forms of memory can be stored and transmitted: “Memory [of trauma] is characterised precisely as non-identical with the happened; meaning is always part of a system of symbol and metaphor, and in the absence of such a system, memories cannot acquire meaning” (Hodgkin and Radstone 98). The experience of trauma is outside the symbolic system that is used to understand, process and narrate memories, thus it remains in the bodily experience and not in the memory storehouse. Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience* suggests it is an inexperience, a gap in the memory, which returns after the event: “trauma is not located in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it

was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on” (Caruth 4). Caruth suggests that trauma creates an unknowability that destabilises any attempts to certify traumatic history. Trauma is instead experienced in the pre-linguistic centres of the brain as a set of physical responses, rather than a conscious ‘story’: it exists in the body’s memory rather than in the pictorial or verbal forms of other memories. This subsequently creates the problems of knowing, telling, hearing and representing, which have been noted within this study. Throughout the novel Burns depicts these missed experiences in a variety of ways; falling asleep or leaving the reality of the moment in dreamlike sequences are repeated motifs that show Amelia and also Vincent’s responses to their traumas. One clear example of this is in “Triggers, 1991”, the chapter that describes Amelia’s breakdown.

The two chapters, “Triggers, 1991” and “No Bones, 1991-1992” place Amelia in London and therefore out of the traumatic location of Northern Ireland, in a space beyond the trauma. Several symptoms of PTSD are described in these two chapters. In “Triggers” London is an unfamiliar place, but a safe space where Amelia suddenly sees that her typical responses to triggers, such as sirens and children’s voices, are no longer appropriate. Burns suggests, “Amelia went to Camden Town to have a breakdown”; now she is in relative safety Amelia can begin processing what she has gone through (Burns 246). Like Vincent in an earlier chapter, Amelia has separated out a part of her consciousness, which she refers to as “Deprived Depressed” or Depdep. Amelia talks to that broken part of herself, bargaining and trying to bring normality, but it becomes too much and she collapses, holding onto the security grille outside the supermarket in such a way as to express her imprisonment to the traumatic memories. Amelia becomes detached from reality as parts of her repressed memories attempt to resurface. Burns’ use of the past imperfect tense shows that this is a process that Amelia has repeated; these are suppressed experiences that are alive in her unconscious, repeatedly “becoming” and then “forgotten”: “ ‘I’m not feeling connected. I feel as if, really, I’m standing over there.’ [...] already she could no longer remember. Why had her mind gone funny? Why was everything becoming forgot” (Burns 253). As she holds onto the wire Amelia becomes imprisoned by the ghosts of her past who are walking with her on the London streets. She begins to relive the past in flashbacks, bringing to life past traumas:

Roberta shouldn't have been walking by and Amelia had no business to be seeing her, for Roberta'd been blown up by a carbomb in 1975. "That can't be Roberta," said Amelia, knowing it for a fact because she remembered that she'd forgotten, deliberately, to go to Roberta's funeral. (Burns 251)

Amelia was late meeting her friend and for this reason alone she escaped being present when Roberta was killed. She feels the guilt of surviving when her best friend did not. As on other occasions she suppressed her grief and went on with her life. Burns is again showing how the trauma exists as a gap in Amelia's consciousness.

In "No Bones, 1991-1992" Amelia is in a psychiatric ward and, like Vincent, finds it difficult to separate dream and reality. She remains in "dual realities" with prolonged flashbacks and nightmarish dreams invading her waking and sleeping hours: "Amelia couldn't see at present very well at all. She was having double vision, triple vision, zigzag vision, polka dot vision, things missing out of the corner of her eyes vision" (Burns 262). Amelia's guilt over Roberta is deepened by her memories of further traumas; the death of her neighbour and her father's near death experience, her sister Lizzy's suicide, her brother's and other friend's deaths, many of which symbolise how close she herself came to dying. Amelia's haunting brings to light the full extent of what has happened to her and to those she has been close to. In one dream-sequence Amelia finds herself in the old famine graveyard filled with the bones of the past, which is symbolic of Ireland's past traumas as well as her own (Burns 258). In a nightmare sequence Amelia goes into a cottage with Roberta and Bernie who act like poltergeists breaking dishes and throwing things (Burns 264-5). Amelia discovers that she has no way of escaping the dead, whether it is the past traumas reverberating through Irish history, or the recent deaths of people she knows, and the reference to old newspapers suggests how often the recent dead are kept alive in the media. In the end of this nightmare Amelia finds herself being eaten alive by the lump of flesh (from a previous chapter) that attacked her in Bronagh's house. This time it develops antennae and alien-like qualities before becoming recognisable as her brother Mick. In a scene reminiscent of the sexual violence of "Troubles, 1979" Amelia is trapped with her parents and her brother: "near the ground she spied a tiny door. She pulled it open. Inside was black. She squeezed in and pulled it shut. And now, as long as she didn't think about her feelings, about her family, about sex or about Ireland, she could live" (Burns 280). Burns' use of the words family, sex, and Ireland in close proximity, suggests the incest that was described in "Troubles, 1979" is once again haunting Amelia. Amelia's

attempt to hide from her aggressors in a trap door in the ground signals her attempts to repress the memories but, instead of release, the door leads her into a hellish Alice in Wonderland environment, closely buried with all the other dead. Going through this door is like going into a grave, which symbolises how the life-changing impact of trauma has been her encounter with death. Her only escape is to go back into the real world and immerse herself in fictional stories; it is preferable to hear stories of made-up murders than to embrace the real murdered characters in her life.

In many ways this chapter is pivotal in the novel and, as its title suggests by echoing the title of the novel, it is also a summary of the narrative as a whole. Burns re-visits previous chapters and incidents, allowing Amelia in her newly awakened state of consciousness to come to an understanding of what has happened. The reader is made aware of the gap in knowledge from the actual time of the trauma as the stories of the deaths are never told in the timeframe when they occurred but are brought to light post-trauma. Amelia and her friends find ways of coping with the experiences of death and the fear of living under the threat of violence and death: they were unable to take time to grieve or to acknowledge the dead. It is only when Amelia is removed from the place of immediate danger, and the threat of death, that she is able to engage with the past. Burns takes the reader through the emotional horror of Amelia's flashbacks and the triggers that bring the past into the present. Burns uses the trope of the ghost to show the return of the repressed memories and combines this with stylistic effects such as her references to the Gothic scene of the ghost of Cathy crying to be let in at the window of *Wuthering Heights* (Burns 270). Amelia struggles with guilt over the death of her friends and searches to recover the memories she has suppressed for so many years. In addition she finds herself questioning how she has understood society and finds herself lost in a new set of rules. In the depiction of the hospital, Burns turns the irony of Amelia's confusion over racial inter-fighting into a comment about how Ireland's fighting has been misunderstood. Belfast is now a "safe" place in Amelia's mind as it is somewhere she is familiar with, even as it signifies a topsy-turvy world in contrast to where she is now living. Amelia's torture over what is happening to her makes her question the reality of everything and she expresses the way time and place blur into each other:

Day and night blended easily here, the way Belfast and London also seemed to do these days. Amelia held her knees and rocked herself on the mattress. She didn't know how she'd be able, ever, to get herself out of this place. How could she? She wouldn't be sure of the country, she wouldn't be sure of the decade,

she wouldn't be sure if the people she was talking to were even alive or dead.
(Burns 272)

Amelia can no longer stop the traumas of the past becoming part of her present day experiences. Life has become defamiliarised and there are no boundaries, even between life and death. Her life experiences represent both her personal, and the collective traumas of Northern Ireland, where the ghosts of the past spread political stalemate over the peace talks. Amelia can no longer repress the reality of the Troubles and she expresses her trauma as the death of her identity:

“Guess who's dead!” said the first voice again.

“We thought we'd be safe under the table, behind the cushions, behind the chairs.”

“...and she even pretended that her brother - you know - the one you and me know is *really* dead - had been popping in and out for cups of tea the whole time!” - “No!” - “Yes! Aren't people funny! And that's not all...”

“Those scavenger flies are a giveaway.”

“Guess who's dead!”

“It's me!” cried Amelia. “Oh, it's me! It's me that's dead, isn't it?” (Burns 275)

The fragments of Amelia's traumas return in their fractured form to coalesce together as an invasion of her consciousness. Amelia experiences her traumas of the death of others as her own death, which connects her to the ghosts of the dead. Where once she had tried to repress the memories and stop the effects of the trauma, she can now no longer deny the dead. The return of the dead for both Amelia and for Vincent create spaces of madness within the novel as Burns attempts to depict that expression of traumatic symptoms.

Burns uses several literary techniques to demonstrate Amelia's traumas and she produces uncanny responses in the reader on several occasions, as for example in her scene with the lump of flesh that attacks Amelia and the ghosts or voices that haunt Amelia and Vincent. Freud in his work on the uncanny notes how using certain imagery or literary tools can create feelings of horror, dread and fear, which he suggests arise from encountering something that was once familiar but is now repressed and forgotten: “everything is uncanny that ought to have remained hidden and secret, yet comes to light” (Freud 376). Freud uses the German word *unheimlich* to define his idea of the uncanny as something unknown to the conscious mind but which creates a response in the unconscious. Freud describes how this works in literature, “to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton”

(Freud 378). The reader remains in a space of unknowing and it is this very space that produces the feeling of the uncanny; an uncertainty as to why it appears perhaps knowable. Bakhtin's (1984) description of the workings of grotesque realism is similar to Freud's description of the uncanny: "All that is ordinary, commonplace, belonging to everyday life, and recognised by all suddenly becomes meaningless, dubious and hostile. Our own world becomes an alien world. Something frightening is revealed in that which was habitual and secure" (Bakhtin 39). Like Freud, Bakhtin notes that it is the very juxtaposition of the familiar with the unfamiliar that brings out a sense of horror. The uncertainty of this is what unsettles the reader. Burns creates this uncanny "sense of horror" as a way of defamiliarising the events she is describing, which opens up the ability of the text to represent the trauma. The scenes which attempt to narrate Amelia's trauma are therefore the most highly stylised, and the alien world they create suggests the horror of what they are trying to depict.

Amelia's ghosts have a particular significance as they represent her survivor guilt and the repression of her trauma. As has been discussed in previous chapters, the dead and missing bodies can become sites of trauma through their unknowability. Freud suggests our response to death may perhaps be the strongest response we have to the uncanny:

Many people experience the feeling in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts. [...] It is true that the proposition 'All men are mortal' is paraded in text-books of logic as an example of a generalization, but no human being really grasps it, and our unconscious has as little use now as ever for the idea of its mortality. (Freud 395)

Death is the ultimate unknown, as Freud has pointed out, for although it is possible to understand the principle that death is part of life, we cannot know death because we cannot experience death. This unknowability of death therefore creates fear and dread, and thus there is a need to bring the comfort of knowability back to this space through religious practices, commemorative ceremonies and so forth. These known rites allow the living to create a sense of familiarity around a space of unknowingness. The burial of the dead is a way of removing the physical dead body from the public gaze and thus removes what it signifies (the unknowingness of death) from the conscious mind. By producing ghosts in a story, the dead are walking in the world of the living, a place they are no longer supposed to inhabit.

Freud notes that “the primitive fear of the dead is still so strong within us and always ready to come to the surface at any opportunity” but that we ought also in such cases to ask, “what has become of the repression, that necessary condition for enabling a primitive feeling to recur in the shape of an uncanny effect” (Freud 396). In both these situations Freud is highlighting the concept of the return of the repressed, the coming back to the surface of that which has been forgotten or suppressed. He is asking what it is about death and haunting that unsettles and creates fear, particularly in a modern society where there is no longer a belief in ghosts. One answer he posits is that humanity has repressed their primitive belief in the undead, but the memories of this belief still linger so that when, “something actually happens in our lives which seems to support the old, discarded beliefs, we get a feeling of the uncanny” (Freud 402). Therefore when we read of ghosts we are unsettled by the fear of the dead that is awakened in our collective unconscious. In *No Bones* the return of the repressed is the return of hidden and suppressed memories. Amelia is haunted by her dead friends because she has not gone to their funerals or grieved for their passing. When the ghosts walk into her everyday world she “remembered that she’d forgotten” to go to their funerals or mourn for the end of their time with her (Burns 251). Amelia has spent many years trying to forget about her dead friends and the traumatic life of her family. She has continued with her routine life by behaving as normal with her friends and ignoring the gap that has been created by their absence. By bringing the dead into a “dual reality” with the living Burns creates the uncanny atmosphere of unknowability. Within this space there is a blurring of what can be discerned as real and what may be fantasy. Burns shows Amelia’s fear towards the voices and laughter of children and they slip into what Freud would define as non-human or automaton:

Her brain and her nervous system, her heart, couldn’t cope with children. They were the ones who became the adults and she slipped into powerless frightened childhood every time. Still she couldn’t move, except to push her fingers into the metal grille tighter, staring at the bright blood so as to think of nothing else. The children were wearing Halloween masks. She could see this in the reflection of the window. Halloween was over, days, weeks, months, minutes before. She peeked round to double-check this, and they giggled, unsure, disbelieving of her fear of them. They didn’t have on Halloween masks. “Oh,” she thought. She said, “So who had on the masks? How did I get that wrong?” (Burns 254)

The children have become the aggressors, and the danger they signify is multiplied because, by wearing masks they appear as partially human and therefore uncanny, a sensation which is furthered by recreating them as doubles in the mirror of the glass

window. Children, who are typically symbolic of innocence, are transformed into monsters and Amelia in turn, becomes the helpless child. Behind her fears are the repressed memories of her own childhood and the realities of the traumas that she has suffered. Amelia has “slipped into powerless childhood” by returning in a flashback to the time of her trauma. Burns is thus showing how Amelia can be both present on Camden High Street and also back in Belfast experiencing the emotions and picture memories of her traumas. A fluidity is created in the liminal space of the uncanny to allow an understanding of Amelia’s trauma.

Subverting History and Identity through Form

Burns’ experimentation with form and narrative voice is within the tradition of Irish writers such as James Joyce, Flann O’Brien and Patrick McCabe. There are echoes of O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1967) in Burns’ layering of characters within characters and stories within stories. O’Brien’s novel, although mainly a first person narrative, moves between three separate stories set within a framing narrative by an unknown Irish literature student, which allows the characters to create their own stories and characters, within the multi-layered narratives. Burns imitates O’Brien’s layering of characters in Vincent’s focalising narration of his inner voices or alter-egos; Mr Hunch, Mr Parker, Billy Battles and other members of the Inner Circle. Vincent’s self is fragmented into separate characters, all of whom are whole beings in themselves. Each one of Vincent’s characters holds the story of particular traumatic incidents within Vincent’s past. The extent of Vincent’s trauma is such that he cannot contain a singular image of himself; his identity is fractured so that the traumatic experiences remain separate from his dominant identity. It is only by splitting off these memories that Vincent is able to create a sense of self at all, which allows him at times to interact with his friends. This is not only a metaphor for the traumatised individual, but can be considered as a metaphor for the social groups and the nation. Northern Ireland has become disparate to the extent that it cannot remain as a singular whole identity; its identity has become split into separate units equivalent to, but not part of, the whole being from which they are taken. Each unit of Vincent’s character has a separate identity, speaks with a different voice and tells a different story, yet all are incorporated within Vincent’s conscious, that is within the same space, and as such they become a metaphor for the people of Northern Ireland who, despite living within the same six counties, are unable to form a cohesive national identity.

Amelia, like Vincent, also becomes 'hi-jacked' by other characters during her psychotic episode. Amelia's Deprived Depressed and the ghosts of her dead friends, like Vincent's Mr Hunch and the Inner Circle Gang, threaten and abuse her over her past decisions. Burns' use of the grotesque and uncanny to satirise and defamiliarise the violence of trauma is similar to the style adopted by O'Brien, an example of which is found towards the end of *At Swim* when several of the main characters from the separate stories meet together to try to overthrow their creator and the scene (O'Brien 208). The darkly comic style employed by Burns works in much the same fashion as O'Brien's juxtaposition of humour with scenes of torture: the narrative plane is destabilised and the horror of the situation is exacerbated. The experimental structure and ironic tone negate a singular political or textual position and, with the line between fact and fiction impossible to define, multiple interpretations are created. Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963) describes truth as an expression of multiple voices in which no single voice is right or wrong, but all simultaneously carry partial truths that synthesise to complement and contextualise one another. He concludes that the self can never fully be known or defined, and that no individual can be viewed in isolation as everyone influences one another (Bakhtin 135). By creating characters within characters, writers such as Burns (and O'Brien) draw attention to Bakhtin's principles; identity is plural and ever changing, truth is multifarious, and neither can exist in isolation. In addition, by placing multiple voices within her characters Burns could be seen to be suggesting (as she does in the conclusion to the novel) that Ireland must find a way to accommodate all divisions within the one physical space. O'Brien published his novel just two years after the Irish Free State had gained its independence from England and therefore comparisons could be drawn between the character's fight for independence from their author-creator and the Irish War of Independence. In this way O'Brien's novel shows great similarities with Burns' depiction of the Troubles through the parallel struggles of her characters. In addition the experimental style can be seen as a necessary tool in both novels to open up gaps in the narrative for re-defining identity, history and a space for examining the contextual political flux of particular traumatic periods within Ireland.

Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* (1992) has several themes in common with *No Bones* as for example in its depiction of violence through the use of the comic grotesque, the protagonist's youth and subsequent psychological problems, the personal

traumas of the protagonist and his family, and the references to wider social issues. Thematically and stylistically the two novels are comparable in their treatment of traumatic childhoods. Both Burns and McCabe use trauma on a metaphorical level to explore the fracturing of identity and nationhood. *The Butcher Boy* has been critiqued both as an exploration of de Valera's post-independence Ireland, and of postcolonial Ireland through its depiction of the clash between modern and traditional cultures.⁸¹ The novel opens in 1962, which is a mere seven years before the opening chapter of *No Bones*. Ireland's recent traumatic past echoes throughout *The Butcher Boy* and Francie finds himself confronted by it on several occasions. On one instance, when he is hiding in a boiler house he is threatened by the gardener with a pitchfork, who violently acts-out his past experiences of the fight for Irish independence:

Me, he said, who fought for this country. O yes, he says, I was in the GPO in Easter Week. All I cared about in the GPO was Michael Collins and that was only because da was reading a book about him when they were in Bundoran. *Did you know* Michael Collins, I says to him. He nearly had a stroke. *Did I know* him? Didn't he stay in our house! [...] You don't believe me?, he said and gave me a thump on the arm nearly knocked me into the fire. (McCabe 88)

McCabe ties the personal with the collective historic traumas through the inclusion of Collins as the revolutionary hero and thus critiques the nostalgic vision of traditional Ireland by showing how the past can re-surface to resonate in future generations. This shows similarities with Burns' connection of personal traumas to national traumas. The violent past of the War of Independence was sanitised and romanticised through the cultural media of songs and story-telling and McCabe's continual references to stories, television, film and music, bring this to the foreground in the novel, thus acknowledging that the reality of the violence cannot be suppressed, but comes back to haunt the future generations, just as in the abusive father and the murdering son. Burns also deconstructs the romanticism of the past as transposed by songs and stories, to depict how it can breed further violence, however she focuses in particular on its impact upon gender.

In the chapter "The Present Conflict, 1983" Burns turns toward cultural and literary representations and traditions to look at the gender divide in Northern Ireland and how the Troubles restricts the development of feminism. Amelia has decided to go back to college but the opportunities available to her are not only limited, but handicapped by

⁸¹ For example Tom Herron critique of de Valera's Irish utopia in *Contemporary Irish Fiction* (2000) and Gerry Smyth's analysis of postcolonialism in *The Novel and the Nation: Studies in New Irish Fiction* (1997).

the “present conflict” which remains very much in the background of everyday life. Amelia finds her hopes for improving herself are challenged by the aggressive behaviour of Janto, who taunts her for considering going to college: ““What are *you* going to college for? Sure ye’re a girl!”” (Burns 188) Janto becomes angry and aggressive about the “stupid females” who are “totally startin’ to think they’re somethin’” (Burns 188). Janto’s level of hatred includes all females and his aggression towards the RUC and the British Army is only slightly higher than toward women. Burns turns Janto’s bigoted views on women into a fantastical episode to explore the racial and gender bias that was frequently subsumed under political bigotry. She points to the cultural constructs of the gendered body as epitomised in images of the female form from Irish literary traditions. She offsets Amelia’s interactions with the unpredictably violent Janto against the background of imagery from Irish music. Burns is deconstructing the traditional representations of the female body by challenging how it has been used in cultural practices:

It was a tape of fairy-tale folk songs with Janto’s name scrawled across the front. On the cover was a wispy fair maiden, looking frail and feeble and delicate and lonely, as well as powerless and beautiful and, of course, on her own. The songs were by men.[...] And so on, went all the songs, along the lines of ‘Danger! Danger!’ ‘Watch Out for Females!’, ‘Never Trust A Grown Woman With bows In Her Hair!’ (Burns 193)

The ‘danger’ is how they position the male as dominant to, and at war with, the female form. Burns is challenging the portrayal of the female in Irish Romanticism by utilising satire and irony to deconstruct the role literature and culture has played in disempowering women. Janto’s violence toward her implied effrontery, forces Amelia to jump out of the car, watched by the impotent army hiding in the bushes. Burns turns the violence into a comedic critique when Philomena Begley (the ‘Queen’ of Irish country music) intervenes to placate Janto into ironically singing the same songs that had previously made him angry. Janto’s unpredictability is reflected in the behaviour of Fergal and the men who ignore Amelia’s obvious cuts and distress as they focus first on finding a flasher, then on finding Hurricane Higgins in a local pub. This deconstructs their supposed heroic claims to protect their community. Amelia finds herself trapped within this male-dominated space and while she fills out her college application she longs for an existence outside the violent patriarchal power structure. This chapter appears as a criticism of the gender divisions forced upon women and the need to implement the feminist teaching programmes set out at the beginning of the chapter.

The action of the rest of the novel also works to undercut these stereotypical images as both male and female refuse their traditional roles.

Burns' creation of the bizarre world from Amelia's perspective, produces supernatural events that appear unmediated in a realistic world and therefore could be defined using Tzvetan Todorov's (2000) study of the fantastic, which he describes as "an event that cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world" (Todorov 14). Todorov divides the fantastic into: the uncanny fantastic, which places the event within the "laws of reality" (dream, drug induced, madness), or the marvellous fantastic, which suspends the "laws of reality" to suggest "it is an integral part of reality" (Todorov 15). Burns reproduces both forms of the fantastic as she shows the fantastical "reality" of Vincent's psychotic episodes, but also inserts supernatural elements into scenes depicting trauma. Amelia's encounter with violence often leads her to resort to fantastical descriptions; when Amelia feels under threat, the fantastic appears. This is particularly apparent in the two chapters where she is sexually assaulted, but also appears in chapters where these repressed memories are triggered by violent or frightening events, as for example in the chapter entitled "Safe House, 1992" where Amelia has been released from the psychiatric hospital but is still in a transitional period of coming to terms with her past. The house in which Amelia goes to recuperate appears like a war zone with the teapot shaped like a gun and sandbags in the hall with hidden detonators, all pointing towards Amelia. In addition (with echoes of Bronagh's house on the day of Amelia's rape), Burns mixes the domestic with weaponry: Helena puts her gun in a wok, there are knives under the sofa cushions and the kitchen table is covered in devices that could potentially become parts of a bomb:

A pine table with its leaves opened was covered by a chequered tablecloth, with Helena's household stuff spread out on top. There were fusewires, insulating tape, a assortment of screwdrivers, EverReady batteries, clothespegs with their jaws prised open and candles with very long wicks. Apart from this pile of DIY equipment, which gave Amelia an unpleasant *deja vu* feeling, [...] Peace plants were arranged in a row alongside it. All of them were dead. (Burns 285)

Not only does the equipment on the table bring back disturbing memories of Bronagh's table, but the house is like a prison, or an army barrack, and the only non-military objects are dead. These trigger Amelia's uncanny connections to her traumas and the narrative moves toward a fantastical style. The above description also suggests Burns may be drawing a comparison to the peace talks of that period, which were more to do

with fear and weaponry than about peaceful resolutions. This is reinforced when Amelia sees the peace talks on the television: “Two Northern Ireland community leaders were having a fight. It was called a debate and, furious, each leader let the other start but then couldn’t believe the big lies the other was telling and would burst in with ‘Liar! The real truth of the matter is...’ “ (Burns 291). Towards the end of 1992 these particular set of peace talks (which came to be known as the Brooke/Mayhew Talks) ended when the Unionists walked out, leaving two years of attempts at a deadlock. Helena’s rules are nonsensical and Amelia describes her as “under siege”, which would link her to the defensive “siege mentality” often allotted to Unionist politics. Helena and Amelia, like the political parties on the television, are both paranoid and display a complete lack of distrust. Burns therefore, as she does elsewhere in the novel, doubles her chapter into an expression of trauma that is connected to historical events.

The Individual and Collective Trauma

Jenny Edkins in *Trauma and the Politics of Memory* (2003) suggests the root of trauma is the shock experienced when the individual discovers the power relationship beneath the illusion of safety, which once broken denies the underlying narrative about their lives. She states that the true basis of trauma is not helplessness but a “betrayal of trust” by the individuals or authorities that are perceived to be protectorates: “when the community of which we considered ourselves members turns against us or when our family is no longer a source of refuge but a site of danger” (Edkins 4). Trauma can rupture the individual’s sense of identity within the state politics as they become aware of the power structure between the state and its citizens. This point is best illustrated by “In the Crossfire, 1971” when the teachers at Amelia’s school force the children to write a Peace Poem following the correct guidelines set out by the state authority. Amelia does not want to write the poem as she has been commanded; she wants instead to read her story about Ethelred, but in slapstick dark humour, Amelia is forced to comply by her grotesque teacher: “Miss Hanratty would multiple-slap anybody who didn’t get it right. She wouldn’t stand for unreadable writing, anything neurotic, exotic, experimental or new [...] and, concluded Miss Hanratty, ‘I want nice little borders drawn all the way round’ “ (Burns 35). This is referring to the “borders” around Northern Ireland and suggests Burns is doing what Amelia cannot by writing a narrative that gives fluidity, liminality and experimental gaps, which allows for a new reading of the Troubles. The teachers are representatives of the state authority and are determined

to enforce their wishes upon the children. They will do this through whatever force is necessary and will not tolerate equivocations by the children; this reminds Amelia of a previous occasion when the powerful authority of the police forced the whole school to be finger-printed. This part is told in the form of a poem at the end of this chapter:

The children were lined up,
Amelia there too,
Not one of them able to get out of it.
When it came to her turn,
The policewoman took hold,
And forced Amelia's fingers into the thick of it....
(Burns 39)

This chapter illuminates the fears dominant during the period of Internment, which saw the enforced detainment of almost 2,000 people with no paramilitary associations who were by nature of association forced, like Amelia, "into the thick of it". By using a child's viewpoint and symbolic figureheads, Burns attempts to re-create the moment of trauma and the sense of powerlessness against a domineering authority by drawing the reader into the emotional impact upon a shaken community.

Burns turns to a specific trauma buried in the collective psyche in her chapter "Sinner and Souls, 1982" which explores the deep-rooted fears toward loyalist paramilitaries in nationalist and Catholic communities. In this chapter Burns depicts the fear that was in the public psyche during the early 1980s by engaging with a story which dominated the local news. She acknowledges the urban myths alongside the very real threat that surrounded the Shankill Butchers, a splinter group of the UVF that were responsible for the torture and killing of over thirty people. Three of the characters in this chapter come into close contact with the gang and the ending of the chapter signals that there is about to be another victim. No one is safe, no one wants to hear the full story, and everyone has to find a way to keep living in a situation that is untenable. Burns focuses on the vulnerability of Amelia and her friends by repeating words like "dark", "dead", being alone and the precarious nature of walking home (Burns 176, 179, 184). Burns describes the red Ford Cortina, a car that was known to be used by Murphy (who also used a black taxi in his earlier killings): " 'It'll be a black taxi or a red Ford Cortina,' somebody or other had said and this was incredible for a red Ford Cortina was exactly what it was" (Burns 177). Both Fergal and Amelia manage to avoid capture but, as we are told, it may only be on this occasion. However Danny Megahey "was taken, very much against his will, into the heart of the Shankill, where he met his protracted, grisly

and truly awful end”, moments after Amelia had been kissing Danny (Burns 178). Burns repeatedly describes the same route that was taken by the different characters, the time of night and how they are separated from their friends. The repetition serves to show the frequency of the need to take this route, whether this be the physical journey by the characters (as based on real situations) or the psychological journey through the traumas created by the publication and rumours of the vicious murders by the Shankill Butchers. Fergal and Amelia who are survivors of the trauma, display the dissociative patterns of PTSD and this death becomes one of the ghosts who return to haunt Amelia. Fergal lies prone until daylight under the lorry where he went into hiding: “he had withdrawn into his centre. His periphery had gone away” (Burns 179). When he is discovered he is threatened by a man who had previously kneecapped him: “Fergal tried to reconnect himself from the dissociative states his body and mind had got themselves into and Eddie, glancing up and down and around at every second, told him to hurry up, not to be as bloody slow as all that” (Burns 182). Eddie shows the paranoia of living within a place where violence can come from any source; he is worried that he is a target and even though he recognises the young man as a youth from his area, he is afraid that he was planting a car bomb. Burns captures the particular atmosphere created during the Shankill Butcher killings by portraying how no one is safe and no one behaves as they might be expected to, and by highlighting the horrors of living under the constant threat of violent death.

The atmosphere of trauma and fear is prevalent throughout this chapter, as are the problems of narrating and witnessing to the trauma. Edkins sees social order as a fantasy based on master signifiers that constructs an illusion of wholeness to conceal the incomplete symbolic ordering of collective memories. As Edkins says:

[W]ho we are, or who we think we may be, depends very closely on the social context in which we place and find ourselves. Our existence relies not only on our personal survival as individual beings but also, in a very profound sense, on the continuance of the social order that gives our existence meaning and dignity: family, friends, political community, and beliefs. (Edkins 4)

The individual discovers their relationship is one of power and they are in the weaker role. Any illusion of safety is broken and the meaning of their existence, the narrative about their life, is under threat. The trauma can be overwhelming mainly because it reveals and removes all the ordering principles and definitions of humanity in general and of that particular group. Trauma thus creates a gap in the understanding of self and

community, nation, the state, and our relationship toward all of these. The witness to violence has a similar experience of shattering, but with it also comes a sense of shame and feelings of complicity despite their powerless position. Burns captures this in the scene between the friends in the pub. They are all aware of what has happened to Danny but no one is talking about it as they have repressed the memories of his traumatic death. Fergal's attempts to narrate his experience are also refused by the group and he soon 'forgets' the traumatic details. On hearing Fergal's attempts to tell what happened, Amelia realises she also has escaped by minutes from being tortured and killed, but she quickly represses this realisation:

Amelia, who realised, or at least for a moment realised, what it was he was going on about, said she'd walked home, she'd gone that way too. Nothing had happened to her though, she said. She hadn't met a sinner. She hadn't met a soul. She'd forgotten about Danny Megahey. They'd all heard and forgotten about Danny Megahey. Already, he was not remembered. Already, he was gone. (Burns 183)

Danny is the missing part of the narrative; he is the gap that represents the trauma. His murder is something that cannot be told, particularly by Amelia and Fergal who have the guilt of surviving from the same situation. Amelia, as representative of the community, must not tell the story as it is an unbearable trauma within the community at a time when the threat of a similar fate is still possible. The fear remains and the warnings are to be heeded but the danger and grief cannot be spoken of or consciously acknowledged.

The Grotesque

Burns frequently turns to the use of the grotesque in the novel as a way of expressing trauma, and the crisis it creates in identity and narrative. By creating abnormal characters and perverse situations, Burns is refusing to normalise her narrative and is rejecting the authoritative voice that attempts to fix identity and history. The grotesque provides a way of writing, which highlights the uncertainty of a changing period, with the ambiguity of emotion toward those changes, and allows for an exploration of the possibilities incumbent within the changes whilst eschewing the previous traditional strictures. The grotesque is rooted in how it can be utilised as a way of engaging with social history, particularly during traumatic upheavals. Bakhtin foregrounds in *Rabelais and his World* how the grotesque has deconstructive properties by noting how the

liminal space created during carnival time allows for ways of seeing and escaping state hierarchy and prohibitions. The grotesque can either take the comic or playful form described in Bakhtin's work on the carnivalesque, or the tragic form associated with gothic horror and the uncanny. Burns' writing embraces both these forms in separate and also often interlocking scenes, to show how the uncanny and the grotesque can capture individual and social traumas. Mary Russo in *The Female Grotesque* considers Freud's uncanny as the self becoming suppressed by the social, whereas Bakhtin's grotesque is the self expressing the social. Russo acknowledges that while these two apparently opposite forms would suggest a division between the comic exploration of society and the darker world of the hidden psyche, it also shows an overlap in the way that both forms of the grotesque express the repressed or suppressed political unconscious. This is indeed how Burns uses the grotesque in her writing as it defamiliarises the social world and explores the traumatised self. Russo's work on the grotesque suggests it is a way of writing narrative that creates fluidity as it is "inclusive of all possibilities" by blurring the boundaries (Russo 93). This makes the grotesque particularly useful for texts that explore identity, and Burns turns to its deviations to explore national, gender and other forms of identity within family and social groups: she uses both the comic carnivalesque and the uncanny as parallel aspects of the grotesque, often within the same chapter, to explore individual and social phenomena. The grotesque thus has the ability to exorcise both interior consciousness and social spaces.

Russo notes how, although the carnival creates a space that can disrupt the social norm, this is not necessarily liberating if the tropes reinforce rather than expand a hierarchical gendered identity. Russo notes how the grotesque begins with the image of the cave, which has led to its connection with the abject; it begins with the "cavernous anatomical female body" and "all the detritus of the body that is separated out and placed with terror and revulsion" (Russo 1, 2). This has implications for portrayals of the female form especially when suggesting the maternal figure is a grotesque concept of women. An example of this is Bakhtin's use of the Kerch terracotta collection (which he describes as pregnant elderly laughing 'hags') as an example of "pregnant death"; the old giving birth to the new (Bakhtin 24). Burns engages with the grotesque maternal figure on several occasions, not however as a negative image of the female but, in accord with her other use of form and style, as an expression of the emotional horror of trauma. An early example is in the chapter "Babies, 1974" where Amelia's uncertain

narration leaves us not knowing whether her friend Mary Dolan is pushing a dead baby or a bomb around in her doll's pram. The horror of the situation is that the baby was the result of an incestuous rape: "Mary Dolan had her baby someone said. There'd been problems with it coming out, maybe because of all the age she was. Her da was pretending he'd nothing to do with it and her ma was still not noticing. Nobody got in the doctor" (Burns 65). Mary's baby was born dead, but in her traumatised state she is pushing it around the area in her old toy pram. Amelia knows the rumours about Mary's baby but when she meets with Mary, she mistakes the body for a bomb and panics: "It wasn't a baby. It was a strange-looking parcel, grey and plumped up with bits of dark wire and putty at the top" (Burns 67). At this point we are made aware of the danger and Amelia's fear as the soldiers start to train their guns on them and the ice-cream van, which is also used to transport guns, comes into the scene. As Amelia wheels them both to safety she goes for a closer look:

I pulled off the cover and lifted all the cloths. The cabbage smell was thick. It was sickening.
I peered at the grey package. There was definitely strings or thin wires, you know, just under the surface. Was it a bomb? What did a bomb look like? Not like a soldier anyway. I touched it. It felt leathery and dry and a bit soft. I pulled at the thick putty at the top to open it.
And that's when I realised the material was see-through. Most of the putty was on the inside only it wasn't putty. It was a bit of a baby's head. (Burns 69)

This description serves two purposes: firstly its use of grotesque imagery narrated through Amelia's eyes brings the reader into close proximity with the trauma, and secondly Burns uses the image as a metaphorical exploration of responses to trauma. 1974 is officially recorded as the year with the largest death toll in a single day when four Loyalist car bombs exploded in Dublin and Monaghan killing thirty people and injuring two hundred and fifty-eight. At the heart of Burns' chapter is the message of the trauma, shocking, unknowable and indescribable. Burns therefore turns to the grotesque image of a dead baby, which also looks like a bomb to capture the trauma of this historic period.

Mary Dolan appears several times in the novel and is twice associated with babies: her dead baby is symbolic of the political crisis of 1974 and Vincent's description of her premature baby of 1980 examines the political moves that brought further violence to Ireland. When Mary is again pregnant in 1980, she is so afraid of the baby that Vincent persuades her to remove it: "It was sitting on her thumb and it *was* a baby, there was no

bones about that. There was no bones either, about who the father of this baby was. Clear as day, sitting on Mary Dolan's thumb, was a girl-ba with Mickey Lovett's face" (Burns 140). Vincent watches as Mary's father and then other relatives hit Mary (Vincent supposes this is because it was Mickey's baby and not her father's) and then he tells her to put the baby back inside before it dies. It is possible this is a reference to the previous birth and that Vincent is imagining or remembering aspects of Mary's delivery, mixing it up with the horror he felt at what had happened to her. Burns may also be using the trope of birthing to examine the hope or hopelessness of the move towards a peaceful future and the power struggles within the political and paramilitary groups. As Russo points out, identity becomes fluid by using the metaphor of the pregnant woman:

Female sexuality and especially the mother's body, as it figures simultaneously demarcation and dissolution of identity, serve this cultural project of disrupting the political economy of the sign as it is produced in dominant discourse. (Russo 67)

Russo interrogates Bakhtin's perfect example of the grotesque, the pregnant hag, which she suggests embodies fear and loathing for reproduction, and thus ignores the gendering of body politics and repression of the female grotesque. By using the female body and the maternal in this way Burns is thus unsettling issues of identity whilst also giving a clear indication of how the grotesque is involved in the violence of the political process.

A further example of how Burns uses pregnancy and the grotesque to explore the female identity in crisis is in the character of Bronagh McCabe, who could be described as an example of an abject body in her close association with fecundity and violence. She is linked with laughter, physicality, birthing, and the maternal. She is also connected with death, both in her persuasion of her old school friend to collude with her to plan the murder of several police figures and in her knowledge of guns and bombs. Barbara Creed in *The Monstrous Feminine* (2007) discusses how horror illustrates abjection by deconstructing the border between human and non-human in the form of the maternal figure. She considers that the grotesque image of the female form is "almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive functions" and suggests that the pregnant woman is so often depicted as a monster because her full womb is no longer a lack thus she can no longer be defined or controlled by the patriarchal phallogocentric system (Creed 7). Burns creates a grotesque female figure in Bronagh whose exuberant

behaviour, fecundity and love of violence places her as an abject female in opposition to Amelia: “Violence in her world seemed some sort of Vitamin-taking experience. It tended to be the opposite in mine” (Burns 74). In “The Least Inattention, 1975”, Bronagh mistakenly shoots Grainne Bates for Amelia’s “crime”. When she pulls the trigger Amelia has a flashback to the “female smiling monster” from the earlier scene in the school, who forced her to have her finger-prints recorded:

[A]s Bronagh McCabe shot Grainne Bates in the secondary school playyard, all I could do was stand there and think, how strange it was the way things came back. [...] I wanted to think about that fingerprinting business and I wanted to know if there was any more of it to come. It was a very slippery memory and the least inattention and it might slide away forever. [...] Bronagh was taken away to be charged as an underage gunman and I forgot her for quite a lot of years. In fact, I can’t remember the order of things much after that day. (Burns 76)

Bronagh’s action reminds Amelia of her shock at the RUC Special Branch officer who made her feel like a criminal. Burns uses this scene to reference the upsurge of violence following the shock of Internment and the resulting wrongful arrests and forced confessions. The trauma of these two events converge in Amelia’s mind and find a site for their trauma in the figure of Bronagh. Amelia is now aware that no one is safe in a system where the state behaves violently towards their citizens and where school children can bring guns into school. Bronagh’s shooting of Grainne makes the fear of death a reality for Amelia when she realises that if Bronagh had known it was her who had dated Bronagh’s boyfriend then she would have been the one who was shot. Bronagh therefore becomes a visible threat to Amelia’s life and a physical site for her fear of death. Bronagh who lives by the rules of violence, is to become a monstrous maternal figure over-spilling into the other characters’ lives bringing destruction in her wake.

Burns first introduces Bronagh as a mother-figure in the chapter “Incoming, 1986” where, despite her care of six lively children, she is involved in planning murders and bombs. In this chapter Bronagh is a powerful woman associated with death and fecundity. Bronagh persuades Marseillaise, who is married to a high ranking RUC officer, that she would be better considering monetary compensation for her husband’s death in the line of duty, and to provide details of her home and the dates, times and number of high ranking detectives who visit regularly. In the background to this conversation Baby Wolfe Tone is actively present, throwing bottles while the police

keep trying to move everyone in the bar further away from a cordon they are putting in place for the bomb scare:

“Bronagh Immaculata McCabe.” The RUC man strode over. “Conspiring to cause explosions - 1979, wasn’t it? Underage shooting - 1975, wasn’t it? Grievous bodily harm - 1978, wasn’t it? Let’s see, what else is there I might have left out?”

Bronagh straightened up from the pram and beamed.

“Ach,” she said. “I was just a wee girl. Didn’t know what I was doin’ then. I know what I’m doin’ now.” (Burns 210)

The combination of a mother with her children, alongside a discussion which involves organising multiple murders, serves to make what is happening more shocking. This is magnified in “War Spasms, 1988” where the domestic and maternal sits alongside the female terrorist. Amelia has returned to the Ardoyne because she has heard that her brother Mick has been shot as an informer. By the late 1980s there had been many such shootings as an attempt to prevent paramilitary members from turning state witness. The reader is told very little about Mick’s death and it remains, like so many traumas, as a gap in the narrative. The “spasms” of the title are echoed in Amelia’s stomach aches, which are described in such a way as to suggest phantom birthing pains. The whole chapter appears as a diatribe against the way that history can echo throughout current traumas. Bronagh is preparing a bomb and, as part of her psychological preparation she rapes Amelia. Amelia in turn, is emotionally absent from what is happening to her: “Already she couldn’t remember”; “Amelia was in blank mode” and “she submitted [...] her mind no longer functioning” (Burns 219, 224, 225). There is a weariness and acceptance about Amelia that has been growing in recent years and, despite all her efforts to stay free of alcohol and anorexia, Amelia continues to rely on her old coping mechanisms; she appear to have become a victim:

Amelia didn’t see it coming, didn’t stop it coming, didn’t know how to stop it coming, didn’t admit, in fact, what it really was. There was something childlike about Amelia, but not endearingly childlike; frighteningly childlike. Amelia was no child you see. Amelia was an adult. [...] Amelia felt the spiders and she didn’t like spiders, but she did nothing to stop them. Amelia was in blank mode. Amelia was at a funeral. She knew how to behave at funerals. She’d been to funerals, oh so many times before. (Burns 224)

Once again children are a dominant metaphor linked to trauma, as is the image of the spider, which first appeared in her nightmare encounter with trauma when her family

home was attacked. As was the case in that instance, Amelia has disappeared during the actual traumatic event itself.

The juxtaposition of innocence and normality with the shocking details that follows, are how Burns tries to recapture the trauma: “three old teddybears. One had an arm missing, the other an eye missing, the third had stuffing spilling out from everywhere. An Action Man in fatigues, his plastic rifle at the ready” (Burns 227). Burns tries once again to mix the innocence of children with violence and death to re-create the shock of trauma and she does so using a style that also highlights the unknowability of the trauma. She re-creates the emotional impact of the traumas of that year by placing it in a domestic scene, filled with young children and their toys, and turns it into a scene where one woman prepares for a bombing mission by raping another woman with her six young children as witnesses. In addition she once again links the past to the current situation to show the echoes through the generations of historical traumas:

“Never you mind,” she said and to Kevin-Barry she said, “never you mind either” and she pushed his hand away as he grappled to get the box back. By this time all the other children had tumbled into the kitchen also. They consisted of twins, triplets and the toddler, Baby Wolfe Tone. Bronagh had six kids, kids being the name for what she called them. They were doomed, by a legacy, by Ireland, by England, by prehistory, by everything that had gone before them, always and forever to be one, four and six years old. (Burns 226)

Burns has compacted several metaphors within the depiction of Bronagh’s six children (who could be seen as the six counties of Northern Ireland). Burns names five of the six twins as Patrick-P, Henry-C, Kevin-Barry, Henry-Joy and Wolfe Tone, all of which are references to important historical figureheads of Irish rebellions. Patrick Pearse and James Connolly were the figureheads of the 1916 Easter Rising, Henry Joy fought alongside Tone during the 1798 Irish Rebellion and was hung in Belfast’s Corn Market, and Kevin Barry who is romanticised in commemorative ballads for being the first IRA member to be tortured and hanged since the Rising. This is underscored by Burns’ references to the children’s ages as one, four and six, which, in light of her metaphors, are likely to be references to the annual commemorations of Bloody Sunday on 29th January (first month), the Easter Rising on Easter Sunday (usually the fourth month) and Wolfe Tone Day on 20th June (sixth month). Burns has Bronagh make a mockery of the concept of peaceful politics upheld by Connolly, by destroying the heads as she prepares for further violence:

The heads of these jellybabies were the only bits that were left. Her fingers closed around them. She scooped a heap out. "James-C, bless him," she laughed. "He's a soft-hearted wee eejit. He thinks he hasn't killed them as long as he doesn't eat the heads." She laughed again and threw a handful of heads into her mouth. She ate them, chewed on them, put her own head back on the pillow and sucked and swallowed the. Then she was ready, swinging herself, no nonsense, up and out of that bed. (Burns 229)

Burns has created a grotesque image of violence connected to the past violence of the Rising and present violence of the Troubles. Bakhtin suggests that the period during which the carnival is active is a special liminal period of time that rejects framing narratives and allows for a new reading of the world beyond traditional schema. In many ways this is similar to the trauma time defined by Edkins, as a space of disruption and breaking of previous boundaries and lexicons. New ways of seeing the world, both past and present are therefore created in the gaps opened by Burns' grotesque depictions of trauma.

Bronagh's grotesque behaviour is reinforced by the uncanny experiences Amelia describes in her response to her trauma:

Something came around Amelia's legs then, slid quickly round her ankles and "What's that!" she cried, jumping and snapping her legs apart. There was nothing there. [...] She kept looking and a chunk of meat began to crawl its way across. It was raw, bright red, glistening and crawling over the teddybears. After that, it crawled over the jelly heads. Coming closer and closer to her thigh.

[...]

As she reached for the bottle, stretching her hand out to take it, a shadow passed through her forearm and disappeared into the wall. Her arm still stretched out, because she had become frozen and was unable to move it, then did move it, and moved herself, as something slid behind her, out of the cupboardroom door. She grabbed her jacket, rushed out the back way, running from that house and all the unholy things it stood for. (Burns 229, 230)

Amelia's encounter with the coalescing of past and present violence leaves her haunted by the ghosts and shadows of the dead. The assembled bomb has disappeared from the table and the "meat" which may be a reference to the remains of the victims of the explosion, but is also related to her previous experience of sexual assault when Mick was ripped into pieces of meat after he tried to rape Amelia, and thus it is also Amelia's guilt at being part of the process. She may have been an unwilling victim herself, but Amelia, by not fighting against Bronagh and by not questioning or ignoring the bomb, has taken on the guilt of being a survivor of the trauma and may indeed feel she has become associated with the murders. This is not an unusual response for those who have

been subjected to trauma. Survivor guilt and the mis-remembering or forgetting of the traumas in which survivors feel partly to blame, is a well-documented aspect of PTSD, as noted by Edkins:

Witnessing violence done to others and surviving can seem to be as traumatic as suffering brutality oneself. Here a sense of shame is paramount. The survivor feels complicit in the betrayal perpetrated by others. In this sense the survivor of a rape or of incest is ashamed for the protagonist of violence against them as well as for themselves. (Edkins 4)

Amelia has been both a witness to the traumas inflicted on others and the survivor of crimes that she could have been subjected to, and as in this chapter, she is the survivor of sexual violence against her own body. Burns considers later in the novel how all these traumas will return to haunt Amelia again and again.

One further way that Burns depicts the grotesque is in the way her characters use and abuse their bodies with food, drugs and alcohol. There are many references in *No Bones* to food and alcohol as both weapons and ways of keeping control. In “Somethin’ Political, 1977” the girls in Amelia’s school decide to protest by refusing to eat, but this confuses the eating rules that many of the girls already have in place: “It seemed the first rebellion was to refuse food. Well, I was already doing that, had been for over three years and all for a reason that was inner, top secret and to do with my own soul” (Burns 79). Amelia’s anorexia becomes a metaphor in this chapter for the beginning of the Hunger Strikes, but it also shows how the body has become a site of conflict. Burns depicts eating disorders and alcohol abuse as a “normal” part of life and the young Amelia learns from an early age that adults abuse their bodies. For example, the school teachers in “In the Crossfire, 1971” are described as “massively violent, insane [...] all fit to bustin’ and tickin’ away like Bombs”, with Miss Jean Hanratty in particular aggressive due to “her bad temper and long-established alcoholic state always so high as to blot out any idea of a short-term memory” (Burns 30). In “Battles, 1987” Amelia has developed into an alcoholic and Burns also shows young children, such as ten year old Josie and Amelia’s nine year old cousin Johnny, as abusing alcohol.

Bakhtin employs the example of Morolf in *Rabelais* to describe how the grotesque may have a strong emphasis on the body, “food, drink, digestion, and sexual life” (Bakhtin 20). Burns’ use of this carnivalesque technique is found in her chapter on sexual abuse within the family. Burns destroys the traditional image of the loving and caring family and safe space of the home, which is in keeping with Bakhtin’s definition of

degradation as both destroying, and birthing or regenerating. The chapter “Troubles, 1979” turns a family evening at home into a grotesque description of the abuse of food and sexual abuse. This chapter, which signifies the ten year anniversary of the start of the Troubles, has changed narrative direction to place Amelia in the third person, introducing the reader to her as if she is an unknown character:

[O]ne of Mick’s sisters, the middle one, the anorexic one, opened the door and walked in. A few bare bones: this sister was called Amelia, she was seventeen, she never ate food, suffered constant tummy aches, didn’t understand why and was outrageously, sexually thin. She came in the door with that arm-swinging vigour all six-stone hunger-strikers are very keen on – or at least while on one of their extraordinary highs. (Burns 123)

This description of Amelia as underweight and under developed is used on several occasions when she is to encounter trauma. In this case it could also be seen to be a reference to political events as it uses the term “hunger-strikers” to describe Amelia. Amelia, who has developed an eating disorder as a way of coping with her trauma stands in stark contrast to her brother and sister-in-law who abuse food in their sexual games: “Chinks were appearing in her armour, her precious lack of food was saving her no more and their greedy sexing was becoming apparent from every nook and cranny of the house” (Burns 124) The body has become a grotesque site of war and Amelia is under attack from all sides: “being at war with her body, indeed with anybody, so it was inevitable, now wasn’t it, that bodies would be the very things that would hit her” (Burns 128) Her careful control of her body does not prevent her from being vulnerable to her attackers and the battle that ensues leaves Amelia, “holding her head, which was ripped down the middle” and her brother Mick “torn to pieces” (Burns 129). Burns’ scene turns the domestic and private lives of the family into a battlefield with sexual violence as its main focus. The traumatic impact of the political violence is now physically evidenced on the broken bodies of Amelia and her family.

The abject bodies of the dead are missing from the majority of the novel and only appear in “Waked, 1989” towards the end of the novel when Amelia is summoned to her sister’s coffin. This scene allows her to look at how women have become caught in the traumas and the destructive ways that they are coping with their lives, whilst also engaging with the political stalemate of the late 1980s. Amelia, who because she is afraid to go back into the Ardoyne, is now living in the Botanic area of Belfast, which is described as having the “illusion” of safety, is preparing for the fifth time to leave Belfast for London via the ferry to Liverpool, but is interrupted by her “nine-year-old

drunken” cousin Johnny who brings news that her sister Lizzy has taken a fatal overdose of anti-depressants. Lizzy is in her sister-in-law Mena’s house (we are told Mick is now one of the disappeared) and Josie, the younger sister whom Amelia barely knows opens the door. All the women in the room are drunk and feeling guilty. Lizzy had attempted suicide before but they had not taken her recent threats seriously or tried to stop her. They all suggest it is common practice to store up anti-depressants and other tablets as a type of safety net or way out: “A Comfort, a final way out, for a mind to hold onto. ‘You know what it’s like Amelia,’ they urged, ‘in bloody shitty life’” (Burns 236). Burns once again mixes children playing with the dead, as Amelia has to step over them to look at her sister:

She touched her sister’s [hand] and it was clenched, a stony fist, just as it had been in her life always. Amelia was sad that her sister was to be buried in that way. She put her own hand around the fist and held it and a shadow fell across the coffin. The shadow didn’t move. (Burns 237)

Amelia is shocked to see how old, yellow and damaged her sister looks, and describes her as “not-Lizzie” (Burns 237). The shock of seeing her first dead body “wakes” Amelia to the reality of the traumatised women and children around the room. She realises that she must act before she too becomes a victim like Lizzy. She decides to become active rather than remain in the passive half-alive state that she now sees mirrored in the women around her. Amelia realises that she needs to take responsibility for any part she might play in harming others: “She didn’t have to be responsible for everything. She could be responsible for the little bit she had” (Burns 234) Amelia sees the children playing with her old collection of rubber bullets. This is ironic as the debate on plastic bullets came to a conclusion in 1989 when the UDR stated they would continue with the use of plastic bullets despite the death earlier that year of a minor and the human rights and European law cases showing how dangerous they were, particularly for children.⁸² She takes what is left of her rubber bullet collection and puts them in her backpack along with a brick that one of the boys is playing with, and leaves the house: “Amelia got out and closed the door. She exhaled deeply. Leaning against the funeral bow, she then breathed in slowly, just as deep, again. She felt dizzy with the way feelings went. How did anybody ever survive feelings?” (Burns 234) Amelia’s encounter with the dead body has awakened her emotions and initiated her journey away from the Troubles.

⁸² <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch89.htm>

This chapter therefore also signifies the imminent ending of the Troubles through the beginning of the lengthy peace process. Amelia meets Dawn, Mary Dolan's daughter on the pathway outside the house, which signifies the start of the journey toward peace. Described as being about nine years old, Dawn must be the baby that Vincent prevented from being born too early. This suggests the significance of Dawn in the narrative, as she symbolises the peace process that was halted in its premature state nine years before. The 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement between the Irish and British governments, although the biggest break-through in the peace process, also brought an escalation of violence. Dawn therefore signifies the violence rather than peace that was brought about by this failed attempt whilst also recognising that it was a necessary part of the process that eventually led to the finalising of the peace agreement. Dawn wants Amelia to remember the good things about Lizzy and tries to hold Amelia's hand and sit on her knee, which suggests her empathy for the loss of family and her desire to make a connection with her traumas. As Mary and Dawn say goodbye to Amelia, she wonders how the young girl can look both like her brother Mick and like Jat McDaide. The implication is that she is the amalgamation of the two sides of the republican movement and, as her name suggests, she embodies a new way forward for the future. Dawn also implies that Amelia is at the end of the long dark period she has been living through and that there may be hope for a new future.

A Peace Process

The last chapter of Burns' novel, "A Peace Process, 1994", explores the political talks resulting in the Good Friday Agreement. Burns continues to use the grotesque and carnivalesque to defamiliarise her readers from the media representations of well-known public events. 1994 was an important turning point in the peace talks as it signalled the IRA and Loyalist paramilitary ceasefires and the inclusion of Sinn Fein in the talks. Burns chose to begin her novel at the crucial moment when the Troubles reached their violent beginnings and ends it with the IRA and loyalist ceasefires and the start of earnest peace talks between Sein Finn, the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Office (on behalf of the British Government). The Troubles have been referred to as the thirty year war as they are seen to have begun in 1968 with the start of the violence and ended in 1998 with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Throughout the novel, Burns made specific choices about dates to highlight what she perceives to be significant historical and frequently traumatic events. Her reasons for choosing 1994 as

the ending date may be linked to the fact that this is the year when both the IRA and CLMC (Combined Loyalist Military Command) announced their ceasefires. Burns highlights the significance she places on the ceasefires in the opening sentence to the chapter: “They were watching something on the TV about a possible ceasefire when out of the blue, Amelia made an outrageous suggestion” (Burns 297). Just as 1969 was the year when violence arrived at Amelia’s door, the ceasefire can be seen as the end of the threat of violence in her everyday life. The traumatic impact of living on a daily basis with the threat of violence or death to self and others, was ended with the dual declaration and the hope for lasting peace through representative talks, which moves the war from the streets to the political arena. The impact of this moment for Amelia’s future is captured by Burns in the metaphor of a journey, which she turns into a comical encounter with the past and its continual influence on Amelia’s life despite the hope of a peaceful political end to the violence.

In this final chapter Burns uses farce to capture both the political climate and many of the historical moments of the peace process. As Bakhtin suggests carnivalesque laughter is all about freedom from state and religious laws. Northern Ireland has a history of political satire, thus suggesting it is an important form for interacting with history. Laughter can be a subversive force as it can reduce powerful figures and create spaces for social commentary. Bakhtin defines carnival as falling in the space between art and life; “it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern of play” (Bakhtin 7). Fools and clowns are also “borderline between life and art” representing “real and ideal at the same time” (Bakhtin 8). This is indeed how Burns utilises her plotline and characters in this final chapter, where she explores key events and figures from the peace talks. There were several attempts over the years to reach peace through the political process. In the 1990s various anti-discrimination laws were passed, America began to be involved and both the Irish and British governments were in secret talks with the IRA. This resulted in the Downing Street Declaration of 1993, which granted Northern Ireland the right to vote for unity. On 31 August 1994 the IRA called a ceasefire, which was shortly followed by a ceasefire from the Loyalist paramilitaries and the ‘talks-about-talks’ period began.⁸³ Burns turns this process into an outing with all the main characters from the first chapter brought back together again in the Bone and ready to go on a trip. She

⁸³ In April 1998 a copy of the Good Friday Agreement was posted to every household in Northern Ireland. A three-pronged approach to governing was created to enable communication between key political voices on both islands.

echoes the fears over change that were happening throughout the peace process: “It wasn’t as if their long-established, insular identities which they relied upon so heavily, could be ravaged and taken away from them just like that” (Burns 299). Amelia thinks of the list of “impossible things” she has had to put on hold, such as making a lovely home for herself or thinking of the future as a place of “not being afraid” (Burns 300). The traumas of the past decades have prevented the group from thinking of a possible life beyond the violence, but now they see a glimmer of something new ahead. The carnival image continues when “Joe McLean’s girlfriend” squeezes on top of everyone with her furry handbag. What Burns is doing with this situation is to explore the political climate during the early years by satirising the fear of the changes ahead. The desire for an end to the violence was strong, but so too was the fear of what that might mean and the fear of breaking long-held traditions.

To enable a vehicle for change, Amelia and her friends begin a long negotiation of the rules to be followed, and Burns turns the slapstick comedy journey into a farcical re-enactment of the false starts and infighting that became the peace talks. Just like the peace talks, the number of characters to be included keep changing as, in comical fashion they jump in and out of the car:

When they arrived back with the car, the others jumped in immediately. Then they jumped out for that first jump had only been a practice one. They jumped in again, and then out again and then in again [...] While doing all the jumping, they had continually pushed and shoved each other, settling one way, settling another, then rejumping to do it again. (Burns 301)

Burns comically illustrates the lengthy procrastination that was shown by most of the politicians and brings in new characters, wives and girlfriends, to convey the extent of interest in the peace process from both the European community and the Americans. Burns also describes the difficulties of trying to find a way forward when all the previous talks had ended in deadlock. The light-hearted atmosphere at the beginning, which showed their reluctance, has become a grim realisation that they are doing this without any sense of where they are going or how they will safely get there: “They had made no preparation, had no information, no destination, no clue whatsoever as to what was supposed to be going on [...] Maps were another language, signposts a conspiracy. All official-looking things made her nervous and afraid” (Burns 305). The road starts narrowing and the car stops on the edge of the same cliff as the one from Amelia’s nightmares where she met Roberta. These are also the same cliffs on Rathlin, which

Amelia takes as, “a bad omen, some legacy following them everywhere” (Burns 311). The dead are all around once more and the trauma of history remains in the foreground, preventing the characters from moving forward and thus referencing the main stumbling block during the peace process. The group acknowledges the traumas and murders of the past as emphasised by two big stones, which represent how this area contains actual sites of memory of historical traumatic events; the area around Ballycastle with its connections to St Patrick, the Druids, the Irish Kings, and the battles between the Celts and the English, and Rathlin, are all associated with multiple murders.⁸⁴ The past cannot be escaped; the horrors of the trauma, the murders and violence are following the group throughout the trip, just as the traumas of the past proved stumbling blocks for the real-life peace process, which became bogged down in objects and symbols of past traumas and how these would impact a future political situation.

Whilst on the island Amelia and her friends are accosted by Ambrose Gray and sent to the cottage of Cissadaye Farrell. As both are aggressively unfriendly, the group start to long for the safety, or at best familiarity, of home. Once again the group find they are on the edge of the cliff, which they are told is now the “ ‘Cliff of the Screaming’ [...] on this cliff, as on every cliff on Rathlin, at sometime or other in its history, people had been butchered and murdered [...] there was something familiar about sitting, nervy, on the edge of such a borderline” (Burns 319). Yet again, at a crucial point the group are reminded that they are more familiar with trauma than with comfort: “Hatred and revenge thoughts were also within their upbringing” (Burns 320). They are afraid of Ambrose who has laid claim to the island as his property. He, like the old woman in black, appear as figures of Irish mythology and history, trying to keep old ways and aggressions alive. The group recognise that they are not in a position to feel safe just yet, but although they are traumatised by the recent past, they are hopeful for the future:

What if Rathlin Island had also been their homeland? How could they have lived there and yet constantly not be on the defensive, with people like Ambrose Gray always turning up? It was a difficult, scary question and as yet, none of the daytrippers had an answer to it. But it was brave of them to ask it, and they sat close together, and didn't bicker, not once, all the way back to land. (Burns 321)

⁸⁴ This is a reference to the 1575 massacre of the MacDonnell clan by Francis Drake's soldiers when they needlessly slaughter over six hundred men, women and children after they had surrendered to the English army.

This is how Burns ends the novel, with hope for the future, the recognition that there is a long way to go, and the acknowledgement that living with the past and with those who are actively and aggressively antagonistic requires a solution.

This final chapter, set within the ceasefire peace talks, has moved the characters into what can be described as a post-trauma period. This is evidenced by haunting from the past, by the way history leaks into the present-day events, and the discussions of traumatic memories. There are no clear divisions between the ghosts of the past and the characters who represent the traditional images of Ireland as rooted in division and violent deaths. The references to Amelia's experiences in Camden, which was also a post-trauma time, bring the individual and collective traumatic experiences together. This chapter is very much about the group coming together to find a way forward beyond the traumas of the past, yet finding themselves surrounded with constant reminders and episodic returns, as highlighted by the three cliffs on the island becoming the same cliffs as the flashbacks to Amelia's nightmare scene (where the cliffs held the bones of the dead, mainly from the famine graveyard). Traumatic memory is thus represented, as it was in "No Bones, 1991-1992" as being held within sites of memory in the physical landscape.

Amelia noticed she was on the edge of the cliff too. They looked over. It was a heavy drop, a deep, sleepy drop, easy, so easy, to let go, just fall over, and disappear. Out in front though, it was different. Crashing and banging were coming from out there. It was the wind. It threw itself onto the rocks, whipped into the caves, howled around inside them, then screamed its way out again. Water trickled down from somewhere behind them and in the woods, animals cried and killed each other in the night. It was dark. Roberta though, seemed to be shining [...] there were now others, half-present, half-not-present, inching their way out of the darkness towards her. Amelia felt they were familiar and not at all welcome so, in order to get away, she stepped back without hesitation and fell off the edge of the cliff. (Burns 258-9)

This is the 400ft cliff in the Glens, beside the "white slabs of the old famine graveyard" where Amelia met Roberta and the ghosts of her family and friends, whose passing remains as hidden traumas that are now resurfacing. This is the same cliff that Amelia keeps returning to in her journey with her friends. On the surface is the "sleepy" conscious suppression of the memories, which when they surface do so with violent impact. Burns has shown how Amelia was absent from her traumas either by describing her as sleeping or being dead. There is no knowledge in Amelia of her traumas; they remain unknown impressions existing in her physical body but not experienced in her

consciousness. The violence of the wind suggests the violence of the traumas that “howl” and “scream” in Amelia’s unconscious, which is depicted as the “dark” or “caves” and when the repressed memories of the dead attempt to come into the “light” of her conscious mind, Amelia has to move away as the last time she acknowledged these memories she became fractured and unable to function. From the point of view of collective traumas, this quotation illustrates a similar pattern of repression and fear. Part of the peace process is examining the traumas of the past and acknowledging the violence simmering under the surface, which could destroy the talks at any time.

The physical body, like the physical landscape of Ireland, carries the memories of the traumas. Rathlin is described as a place filled with these cliffs and thus filled with the hidden traumas of the past:

They looked to the other side, to Rathlin, to the land which was getting closer. There were cliffs and more cliffs. They seemed to go the whole way round. Amelia recognised them again, for again, they were the same cliffs she’d met dead Roberta McKeown on. She hoped this wasn’t a bad omen, some legacy following them everywhere. (Burns 311)

The place they are visiting for a fun day trip is depicted as walled around with their traumas. Amelia, as she did before in the hospital, must face these traumas and interact with the people she will meet near these cliffs. As in that previous experience, which took Amelia into a traditional Irish cottage (signalling the colonial past), the characters in this chapter represent traditional images of Ireland as they may have been drawn in the nineteenth century cartoonist propaganda: Miss Cissadaye Farrell with her pointy witch-like face and “cold white bony fingers”, Ambrose Gray, the rack-rent drunken landowner “with red bursting-out cheeks, a giant solid belly and a smile that was nasty”, and a little old woman with her scarf tied tightly under her chin (Burns 312, 317). Burns has turned the island of Rathlin into a caricature of Ireland’s colonial past to show how these historical traumas echo through the current political traumas. Trauma, although not consciously known, is present in the ground, in the imagery created by the characters they meet, and in the characters’ own bodies.

Burns very clearly shows that trauma remains in the end as a story that cannot fully be told. The nightmarish cliffs of Amelia’s sleeping and waking dreams describe the breaking through or returning of the traumas into everyday occurrences. Through her use of metaphoric language, imagery and the grotesque, Burns allows for a fluidity

within the dialogue, which leaves space for understanding trauma without closing down the narrative. This is particularly important when describing political trauma that remains within the living memories of those who may share the experiences but not necessarily the same points of view. Edkins has noted that traumatic events can only be depicted by a particular way of inscribing that “encircles” the gap in the narrative:

We cannot address the trauma directly without risking its gentrification. We cannot remember it as something that took place in time, because this would neutralise it. All we can do is ‘to *encircle* again and again the site’ of the trauma, ‘to *mark* it in its very impossibility’. Memory and forgetting are crucial, both in contesting the depoliticisation that goes under the name of politics, and in keeping open a space for the genuine political challenge by encircling the trauma rather than attempting to gentrify it. (Edkins 15)⁸⁵

By returning again and again to the same images of cliffs, and placing these alongside the cluster of metaphors around sleeping and waking, Burns is able to present a story that, as Edkins suggests, keeps open the narrative and allows spaces for engaging with the political questions.

Conclusion

Burns has returned in several places in her novel to the metaphors of birthing, sexual violence and so forth to re-engage with the image of the north, birthed into being as a separate state. She is acknowledging that the trauma of the creation of a divided Ireland has remained within the politics; the state founded on violence will remain a traumatised place. In such a case Edkins notes that there are similar traumatic responses as there might be in sexual abuse:

Political abuse in one parallels sexual abuse in the other. Both give rise to what we call symptoms of trauma. In both cases what has happened is beyond the possibility of communication. There is no language for it. Abuse by the state, the fatherland, like abuse by the father within the family, cannot be spoken in language, since language comes from and belongs to the family and the community. (Edkins 7)

To eschew the problems of using the coloniser’s language to narrate the trauma, postcolonial writers often resort to writing in a postmodern format and Burns has proved to be no exception. Burns has returned to the metaphors of sexual abuse, to

⁸⁵ The quotations are cited by Edkins from Slavoj Žižek *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*. (London: Verso, 1991) p272

enable her to engage with colonial trauma, political trauma, and historical or collective trauma. She does so using grotesque, multi-vocal narratives and other techniques, as described above. By using the grotesque Burns has opened up a fluidity within her narrative to allow for multiple meanings and for an understanding of the unknowability of trauma. In addition, her narrative style has created a space for engaging with the political traumas. Edkins describes the fluidity of identity both from an individual and group context, and how this is altered within traumatic circumstances:

The unconscious mind is structured like a language; in other words, who we think we are is shifting and fluid, until fixed by the social context or the dominant group. [...] As we have seen, in what we call a traumatic event this group betrays us. We can no longer be who we were, and the social context is not what we assumed it to be. It is not all-powerful, it does not have all the answers: in fact its answers are flawed. (Edkins 8)

The opening up of meaning and identity that happens during a period of trauma can, as Burns has described in her last chapter, leave the group searching for signposts to lead them into an unknown future. Trauma in this way can allow for a new understanding of self and nation to emerge. There is a clear sense of this in the ending of *No Bones* when the characters acknowledge that although they have no answers to the future, the journey has opened up a space, which remains open to questioning and therefore presents hope for a new future that can be forged within post-trauma time.

Edkins sums up her understanding of trauma time as a space where linearity and narrative are destabilised. She acknowledges that the post-trauma period is a difficult space where attempts by the state to memorialise the dead are often ways of closing down the questions of national identity. She is therefore sceptical of state commemoration as an overarching narrative that shuts down the political openness which would allow for multiple forms of remembering:

Memorialisation that does not return to a linear narrative but rather retains the trace of another notion of temporality does occur. It is found when the political struggle between linear and trauma time is resolved not by a forgetting of trauma and a return to the linearity, nor by attempting the impossible opposite - speaking from within trauma - but by a recognition and *surrounding* of the trauma at the heart of any social or symbolic order. (Edkins 16)

Burns' writing is an attempt to engage with the traumas after the prolonged period of trauma time has ceased. By engaging in her novel with well-documented traumas from the Troubles, Burns has needed to find a way of encircling the events that allows for an

indirect narrative. Her use of metaphor, allegory and imagery provide her events and her characters with a fluidity that opens up the narrative to enable an understanding of the traumas without placing a finite meaning on its depiction. By re-engaging with traumas throughout the novel, Burns shows its repetitive pattern, not just on an individual level but in the social collective memory, whereby historical traumas echo throughout the future generations. She also shows how the physical landscape and the body can become sites of memory for trauma. Burns engages with the traditional images of Ireland, particularly as it has been gendered, but she moves these into a new understanding that critiques the gendered imagery. In keeping with a literary genre of political engagement with the colonial, Burns utilises postmodern techniques to provide new ways of seeing. She opens up an understanding of both a political and an individual identity in crisis and ends her novel with a fluid space for re-engaging with these important questions in a post-trauma period where trauma remains part of current and future narratives.

Conclusion

Each of the five writers represented in this study has been specifically chosen for the ways in which they engage with gender, memory, and trauma to explore the literary tropes and historical representations of the Troubles. These writers critique the role played by traditional images in Irish literature and culture to disempower women, and they prioritise gender in a variety of ways, not just as it intersects with trauma, but as a major concern within a nation that has assigned gender politics a lower priority than national politics. Within this framework the authors have conceived a variety of narrative explorations of the traumatic impact on the individual and collective identities of women living in the six counties of Northern Ireland. The writers compare in the way they view the past in terms of traumatic sites of memory, whether this be of specific events that, for example, live on within the individual's body, or as they are registered on a collective level in the physical landscape of the North. Each author writes from a different period during the Troubles, which is reflected in how they consider individual and national trauma as a continuation of historical traumas into future generations. Trauma within these texts is a doubling of the recent past with the colonial past so that historical traumas re-emerge or resonate within the present-day. The family is a recurring theme within literature, through which it is possible to explore the social malady and moral ambiguity of the nation, therefore family life is at the heart of these novels and short stories. The microcosm of the family power structure is extrapolated onto the national power struggles, as exemplified by Johnston who utilises the trope of incest to engage with Irish politics and unearth historical traumas. By repeating traumas through multiple characters or across generations, colonial trauma is acknowledged by these writers, and the dead given a voice that testifies to traumatic history. In *Trauma Fiction* (2004) Anne Whitehead notes the dominant role in postcolonial fiction of attempts to recover lost voices and forgotten narratives: "Trauma fiction overlaps with postcolonial fiction in its concern with the recovery of memory and the acknowledgement of the denied, the repressed and the forgotten" (Whitehead 82). By considering a variety of writers who have created multiple or fragmented versions of the same story, it is possible to bear witness to women's encounters with the collective colonial traumas of Northern Irish history.

Writing about trauma requires a specific form and style that engages with the fragmentation and unknowability of a past that may be repressed or not yet experienced within the conscious mind. Laura Pelashiar in *Writing the North* (1998) notes that trying to write about political conflict and trauma has required a metaphorical displacement of emotional responses:

This transposition of actuality into another time and space and into myth makes it possible for Northern writers to contemplate the reality of the North from a distance, while re-establishing that somewhat reassuring principle by which the violence and horror looming over the North are but a manifestation of the violence and horror running throughout the metatext of human history. (Pelashiar 19)

She suggests that writing about the conflict requires a form that allows distance in order to explore the ramifications of the recent traumas and their re-occurring aftermaths.

There are a variety of ways that these writers engage with the problematic representations of Northern Ireland's traumatic history, as for example in: the referencing of Irish literature and myth, the creation of encounters with the uncanny, the use of gothic tropes as a form of intertextuality to examine the postcolonial, the repetition of language, imagery, and plot to consider the return of the repressed, the disruption of the chronology, the experimentation with fantastical-style found in Irish postmodernism and the defamiliarisation of collective traumas through the distancing of narrative tropes to bifurcate colonial past and present. Earlier writers such as Beckett and Anderson find the need to fracture attempts at linear realism at the point when they introduce the traumatic and look to alternative war-torn crises both for their influences on the Troubles and as a trope for exploring war. Madden and Johnston find within the Gothic Big House genre tropes to explore the resurfacing of historical traumas from the colonization of Ireland. Burns' fiction, perhaps due to its retrospective post-trauma position, is able to engage more completely with the prolonged trauma time to dialogue with the collective memories and to seek new forms of representing the past. Writers therefore explore narrative form to enable the expression of the repetitious nature of historical traumas; they are representing the cyclical nature of repressed memories as a continual influence from the recent Troubles.

The way that each writer engages with trauma shows a converging of individual and national trauma through the gaps within their narratives. In this way, through their literary explorations of the Troubles, the authors are demonstrating a theoretical principle at the heart of recent trauma theories. Trauma remains unspoken or

fragmented as authors seek ways to narrate the failure of the conscious mind to integrate trauma beyond its physical sensory existence. The subject matter appears to dictate the need to move beyond realism to grasp the emotional and traumatic elements at the heart of the story. These novels and short stories also engage with Edkins' theories concerning how trauma allows for a breaking down of meanings, which creates a space for re-defining traditional binarisms and thus forces a re-evaluation of concepts of identity and new ways of seeing nation, state and social order. Narratives that encircle the trauma are finding a way of representing a traumatic past that is in essence not fully knowable, while at the same time acknowledging the need to bear witness: it is a way of "not forgetting" (as opposed to the closure implied by the term remembering) the traumatic experiences at the heart of a political crisis, while refusing to be forced into a depoliticizing of the story of the past. By placing trauma theory alongside women's novels and short stories it is therefore possible to gain a new understanding of the traumatic events during the Troubles, the ways in which the traumas from this period resonate with traumas from Ireland's colonial past, and the impact of this period of history upon the individual and collective identities of Northern Irish women.

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